Protection Protocol

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Protection Protocol

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Summary

After receiving a distress signal that can't be ignored the Autobots land on an obscure planet only to find a Temple dedicated to Primus. After disaster strikes and the Autobots are badly injured, Optimus Prime finds an ancient artifact calling out to him. The moment he reaches for it everything changes.

The Fate of Cybertron rests in the hands of the Autobots, whose frames have undergone a transformation none of them ever expected.

A crack-fic where the Decepticons find a bunch of Autobot femmes with sparklings, and choose family instead of violence.

Chapter 1

The distress signal had come out of nowhere one cycle, lighting up their systems and blaring through their headsets. Whatever was causing it was old, ancient if Ironhide was to be believed, and nothing they tried could turn the damned thing off.

It left them wide open to attack.

Red Alert was having a meltdown and only Inferno could keep his amica from going haywire. Ratchet had already threatened to sedate him if he didn't calm down soon.

After much deliberation they decided to see what in the Pit was calling for help and hoped to Primus it wasn't a trap.

Arriving on the obscure outer planet they set out for the distress call, Optimus at the forefront of the party.

"Are you sure you should be walking into this with us, Bossbot?" Bumblebee asked, concern clear in his voice.

"I am." Optimus said, looking down at the advanced scout. "The Matrix is… resonating. Whatever this is could be important, for all Cybertronians."

Bumblebee stared up at him for a long moment before nodding firmly in understanding.

"What about you, old timer?" Cliffjumper asked before having to dodge a thrown wrench.

"I'm here in case your glitched aft gets injured!" The older mech snapped.

"Ratchet." Optimus sighed.

"Don't you 'Ratchet' me, Prime." He grumbled. "This just screams 'trap' in big bright glyphs. I'm going to be right here when you lot step in it and need medical assistance." And his tone of voice brooked no argument.

"Of course, Ratchet. You know I value both your skills and your advice." Optimus said with a small smile, though you could only barely tell behind his battlemask.

“Harrumph.”

“Prime, we’re coming up on the signal now. It’s just over that ridge.” Prowl stated, face a neutral mask.

“I s’spect we’re gonna come face’t’face with whatever’s causin the noise.” Jazz commented, visor flashing in the low light of the planet’s distant sun.

Topping the ridge the group of Autobots stopped and stared in silent awe. In the center of a large bowl was a structure that could only have been made by ancient Cybertronian hands.

“By Primus.” Optimus wasn’t certain who had spoken but he agreed with the sentiment.

“Autobots, let’s approach this cautiously.” He turned to regard those with him. “Bluestreak, Mirage, Sideswipe, Sunstreaker, Jazz. I want you here on overwatch.” The bots he had called quickly took up their positions, though the twins looked less than enthused about being left behind.

“The rest of you, with me.”

The trip to the structure was silent, save for the signal that only got stronger the closer they approached. Coming up to what appeared to be the main doors Optimus stopped and summoned his axe as the others spied the problem and readied themselves for a confrontation.

The front doors had been blasted inwards, the edges melted to slag as one hung from its hinges. It was clear that great force had been used.

Optimus didn’t need to say anything as he cautiously crept inside, Prowl stalking silently at his side.

As they walked the darkened halls distorted voices echoed off the walls, making Optimus tense with anticipation.

“I’m telling you the signal ends here!” Came a familiar voice as they rounded a corner and came into a large domed area at the center of the structure.

“But there is nothing here.” Came a cultured voice, sounding much calmer than the first.

Optimus stopped dead in his tracks, recognizing the group that was

milling about in the middle of the domed room.

“Is that the Wreckers!?” Bumblebee asked loudly in surprise.

Wheeljack, standing between Perceptor and Springer, turned and spied their group. “Prime! Ratch! I’m guessing you guys got the same distress signal as us?”

“We did, yes. Have you found the source?” Optimus asked, subspacing his axe as he stepped forward to inspect the room.

Wheeljack said, “kind of,” at the same moment Perceptor said, “not yet.” The two looked at one another for a long moment before Perceptor let out a small sigh.

“The center of the signal appears to be here in the middle of this room but we have yet to find the source.” Perceptor answered primly.

“Topspin is checking the ceiling to see if anything is up there, and the others were off exploring the rest of temple. They should be back soon, Sir.” Springer supplied with his usual confident smile.

As if on cue the other Wreckers appeared from different entryways around the dome, heading for the middle where their leader was located.

“Did you see anything?” Springer asked his group as they converged.

“Nothing.” Said Broadside. “This place is entirely empty.”

“It gives me the creeps.” Sandstorm added with a shudder.

“I just don’t understand why this signal is even here!” Wheeljack said with some frustration as he fiddled with the scanner in his servos.

As more bots stepped closer to ask questions or state their opinions on how utterly obnoxious the signal was Optimus felt a shift beneath his pedes. Looking down he shifted his pede back and noticed slim fractures in the floor. Optimus’ optics widened when Ratchet nudged Ironhide out of the way so he could admonish Wheeljack for his clear lack of medical care and the floor fractured further.

“Everyone stop!” He called out in warning, but it was too late.

“Woah, what’s gotten into yo-” Topsin landed next to his brother as he spoke, looking confused, and the floor buckled beneath them.

“Brace for impact!” Ironhide yelled as the floor disappeared beneath their pedes.

They fell into the darkness below, Topspin diving for his twin as the light above them illuminated the room below.

Optimus landed hard, rolling to disperse some of the force. Even with the maneuver he could feel his joint creaking from strain. All around him were the frames of his Autobots, most laying motionless. Knocked offline by the fall.

“Optimus!” Taking a couple quick steps he fell to his knee next to the older mech.

“Are you alright, old friend?” He asked worriedly.

Ratchet grimaced. “Nothing a little polish can’t fix.” The older mech grunted as he tried to sit up. Something snapped loudly and the medic let out a staticky hiss of pain. Optimus’ hands hovered over the old mech, uncertain whether moving him would cause more damage or not. “Looks like… one of my spinal struts… pitslag.”

“Don’t move, old friend, I’ll find aid.” He went to move but stopped when the mech’s hand reached for him before falling.

“Optimus.” The old mech said carefully. “Be careful. There’s… something here.” The mech whispered before his optics shuttered. If he hadn’t been able to feel his magnetic field thrumming gently he would have sworn the mech was offline.

Standing he looked over the fallen frames. “Autobots, call out if you’re online!” He called into the cavernous room.

He shuddered when he didn’t hear an echo of his voice. How large was this space?

“Over here Bossbot!” A light flickered on and he sighed a little in relief seeing Bumblebee climbing to his pedes.

“No! Nononononono! Topspin!” Both he and Bumblebee startled when Twin Twist suddenly cried out in anguish.

Hurrying toward the voice he skidded to a stop in front of some rubble. Twin Twist was desperately digging at a large chunk of the ceiling, energon leaking from his servos as fluid fell from his optics. He let out another choked off sob of pain and Bumblebee reached out

to try and stop him.

Optimus put a hand on his shoulder and pulled him back. Trying to stop the frantic mech would only make the situation worse.

“Bumblebee, we need to help him quickly. Topspin is under there.” Pulling out his axe he used it to wedge under the largest piece of debris and planted his feet. Heaving with all his might he lifted the debris and got his hands beneath it. With a massive shove he lifted it higher, enough that Bumblebee could slip inside and haul out the downed flier.

The moment the two of them were clear he eased the debris down and let it go, jumping back so as not to be caught by it.

Twin Twist had taken his brother from Bumblebee and laid him out on the ground, cradling his helm.

Bumblebee knelt next to the twins, expression serious. “Twin Twist, let me help. Okay?”

The mech made a low sound of pain but didn’t stop the scout from checking over his twin.

Optimus knew that they were in good servos and turned his attention to finding his remaining Autobots.

‘Here.’ Twitching at the unfamiliar voice he spun in place, axe gripped tightly in hand. **‘This way.’** It spoke again.

Inside his chassis the Matrix began to thrum, gently at first but quickly growing in strength.

‘This way, Orion Pax.’ Without really understanding why he began following the voice, all other sound drowned out by the humming of the Matrix.

Tripping over uneven ground he fell against a solid mass. Using it to stand he felt along the edges and realized it was a door.

‘Come inside.' Beneath his servos the door opened, a bright light spilling forth and temporarily blinding him. He raised his arm to cover his optics until the light was more bearable again. Putting his arm down he stared into a crystal clear golden pool of unknown liquid. At the center was a pedestal that held a simple cube. Around it was a corona of light, shining like a beacon.

‘Come to me, Orion Pax, Last of the Primes.’ Stepping into the golden liquid he felt it slosh over his pede. The ache from before left him as something warm and comforting embraced his frame. **‘I am Chrono, Guardian of this Temple. It has been eons since I was placed here. Finally it is time I fulfilled my purpose.’**

Optimus stopped before the cube. “What purpose?”

‘To bring an end to the destruction of Cybertron.’ The cube began to glow further. **‘To bring peace. Is that not what you desire as well, Orion Pax?’**

Optimus hesitated. He didn’t know if thie was a trap, even if the Matrix seemed very keen on the idea.

‘I will not harm your comrades. I was meant to create, to heal, not to destroy.’ It reassured him.

Optimus thought about Ratchet and Topspin, both wounded beyond what any of them could reasonably repair. “What about a way out of here?”

‘Yes. I will help you.’

Optimus reached for the cube, hesitated, then grabbed hold of it with both hands.

A searing bolt of electricity ran through his frame, passing over the Matrix, and down into the pool. **‘Restore Cybertron, Prime, and make peace with all beings of Cybertron. This is your duty… your destiny.’**

Light exploded around him and in a flash it was gone.

Optimus blinked up at the ceiling of the temple and frowned in confusion. It looked like the domed room they’d been in before the floor had- Sitting up quickly he looked around him at the fallen forms nearby. All of them were the bare metal of unpainted frames.

One of them groaned and sat up. “What in the slag hit me?” Came an angry feminine voice.

Looking into familiar disgruntled blue optics Optimus froze. “… Ratchet?”

The unpainted femme rolled her optics. “Who else would it-” She

stopped for a moment and scowled in confusion. Looking down at herself the femme let out a shriek of rage. “Who in the Pit reformatted me into a fragging femme!?”

The shriek woke the other forms nearby, who also sat up in alarm.

“What in the slag?” Looking over the one who had spoken Optimus felt a flicker of familiarity and gaped.

“Wheeljack? You’re Wheeljack, aren’t you?” Now that he’d spoken again he realized that his voice was much higher than it had been before.

“Woah, Prime? Is that you?” The former mech looked him up and down for a moment. “Uh… did you know you’re a femme?”

Optimus let out a heavy sigh as he… she? got to her pedes.

“I want everyone to state their designations clearly.” Optimus said.

“Perceptor.” Came a calm yet cultured voice, pitched low but unmistakably feminine.

“S-Springer.” And oh, if the poor femme didn’t look like she was about to break into hysterics at any moment.

“Ratchet.” The angry medic growled.

“Wheeljack.”

"...Prowl."

They all turned to him, her, and she took a deep breath. “Optimus Prime.”

They looked at each other for a moment, feeling about with their magnetic fields to get a sense of one another.

Then Optimus heard it. A high pitched shrieking noise.

“Uh… was that one of you?” Wheeljack asked, optics wide.

“Oh for the love of!” Ratchet launched hi-herself off of the ground and started scanning the room. Over by one of the pillars was a small form, much smaller than any of the Autobots. The small form made another high pitched shrieking sound.

‘Cybertronian Protection Protocol Activated. Prime directives- raise and defend young. Secondary directives- rebuild and repopulate Cyberton.’

Everybot flinched at the same time and Optimus had to assume they had heard the voice just as h-she had.

“Young?” Springer asked, voice wavering slightly.

Just then a group of small forms stumbled into the room, chirping and squalling for attention.

It was a group of young, unpainted and unarmored, sparklings.

“Oh smelter’s rod!” Ratchet cursed, just quietly enough that Optimus could overhear.

“I don’t think the smelter had anything to do with this.” She said quietly, touching the center of her chassis where the Matrix had gone oddly silent. “But the blame can come later. We have work to do.”

Chapter 2

Following the sounds of the sparklings they quickly found another group of bots who had been teleported into the Temple.

By Optimus' count they had eleven adults, recently reformatted into femmes. Herself, Prowl, Jazz, Ratchet, Smokescreen, Blaster and Skyfire who had been all the way at the drop off point, Blurr who had been on the Wreckers' ship, Wheeljack, Perceptor, and Springer.

Which was concerning yet also quite useful as the sparklings outnumbered them two to one. Wrangling all the newly made sparklings was quite an issue and a half.

"Sunstreaker! You can't hit Roadbuster just because he shoved Bluestreak." Optimus admonished as she pulled the two scrappy bots away from each other. Sunstreaker stopped flailing and let out a pitiful chirp as Roadbuster crossed his arms and scowled. On the adult mech it would have been terrifying. On the sparkling it was laughably adorable.

"Uh, I'll take him si-ma- Prime." Springer held out hi-her arms for the sparkling and Optimus thankfully handed him over.

She had enough problems with her own little troublemakers. Bumblebee had latched onto her leg and refused to let go, sitting on her pede and making happy little chirps every time she took a step. Red Alert refused to come out from behind Inferno, the little guy trembling in fear whenever his amica wasn't standing nearby. Sunstreaker and Sideswipe were getting into fights with everybot except Bluestreak or Bumblebee. Ironhide and Broadside were wrestling but it looked mostly harmless so she let it be. And the rest were just running and causing mischief like any curious new spark.

They'd found out quite quickly that the Wreckers only listened to Springer, then Wheeljack, then Perceptor, and only if they had to. The rest were mostly well behaved for Optimus and, surprisingly, Ratchet. She'd forgotten how much the old… the medic had loved sparklings.

"Is it just me or are we younger than we should be?" Wheeljack asked as she lifted the Wrecker twins to her chassis and gave them both a light tap on their helms for causing trouble. It appeared that Topspin and Twin Twist had been attempting to ambush Hot Rod.

“What gave it away?” Ratchet asked, glaring at the inventor.

“Well…” Wheeljack started, waving a hand toward the medic.

A wrench hit her right in the center of the helm with a clang and Wheeljack pouted at her amica.

The sparklings started to giggle, chirping and pointing.

Optimus felt her frame warming at the sound. This. This was what she wanted.

Innocence, life, peace.

“Optimus.” Turning to Smokescreen she raised an optic ridge in question. The Praxian femme looked a mix between determined and concerned as her optics trailed after Bluestreak. “I need to assess the mental faculties of everyone here. Whatever was done to our frames has obviously affected our processors as well. We… I should be feeling more discomfort over the fact that I am now a femme, but I feel as if I have always been this way.”

Prowl looked over at her… sister and gave her a nod of support, door wings twitching behind her slightly in agitation. “I agree with Smokescreen. My logic computer should have crashed more times than I can calculate.” She shook her head.

“At least we’re not sparklins too.” Jazz chimed in, tossing Cliffjumper in the air and catching him again, much to the small bot’s glee. Her voice was still just as smooth as before, only now there was a lilt to it that was even more pleasing to the audials. Comforting.

“That… voice. I assume everyone heard it as well?” Perceptor asked, kneeling next to Sandstorm and consoling the small bot who was clinging to her upper thigh.

“I sure as sla-” Ratchet looked at all the sparklings and let out a frustrated growl, “yes. I heard the- the voice.” The medic went quiet for a moment. “I’ve never heard of that protocol before. If I could get a better look at the code I could explain what, exactly, it’s doing. Although I can already tell it must have accessed and activated the latent caretaker programs in all of us.”

“Caretaker programs?” Springer asked in confusion.

“If you’ve ever had your own sparkling before you’d already know

about them. All bots have the most basic caretaker programs, it doesn't matter how you were sparked. Any bot can form a caretaker bond with a sparkling. Mech or femme, it doesn't matter. Although femmes do have a higher tolerance for taking care of more than one sparkling at a time, they're also better able to keep them in line due to the more interpersonal nature of their sparks."

"So-that-Voice-made-us-into-femmes-so-we-would-be-more-inclined-to-adopt-everybot?" Blurr asked, speaking pattern unchanged even though her voice had a much higher pitched melodic tone to it now. Around her the Aerialbots were chasing one another, except for Skydive who had also come to cling to Optimus' leg armor.

"Yes." Optimus said, looking around at the bots who had once been, and still were, under hi-her command. "And the blame rests solely upon me." She admitted.

The others watched her for a moment and she could see Jazz and Prowl sharing a look filled with layers of understanding. It made her wonder if their conjux bond was still intact or not. Though looking at Inferno and Red Alert she assumed that anything to do with their sparks was still affecting them. It wasn't as if Sideswipe and Sunstreaker or Topspin and Twin Twist could stop being split-spark twins, after all.

"What happened down there Optimus?" Prowl asked, lifting Sideswipe into her arms. The small bot chirped inquisitively before settling down, looking more than content to watch his sibling trying to coax Bluestreak out from behind the older Praxian.

"I… am not certain. I recall hearing a voice and the Matrix reacting to it." She reached up and pressed a hand against her chassis again, but the matrix remained cold. "There was a room filled with golden liquid and a…" She didn't know how to describe what she'd seen. The glyphs just didn't seem to come, no matter how she tried. "A guardian. The guardian gave me a chance. A chance to bring peace, to rebuild Cybertron… to save you all." She looked down at Bumblebee, whose big blue optics looked up at her with adoration. Reaching down she ran her digits gently over his tiny helm, eliciting a content trill. A gentle smile crossed her face before she looked up and locked eyes with each of them. "I am sorry this happened to you… but I could not pass up the chance. I would sacrifice myself a thousand times if it would stop the war."

Grim looks crossed the faces of the other femmes as the sparklings

continued to play. Though it seemed a few of them were already more in tune with their new caretakers than expected as Bumblebee rose onto his pedes and hugged as much of Optimus' leg as he could. Likewise Sideswipe made a forlorn little chirp and snuggled closer to Prowl's chassis, as if trying to ward off the uncomfortable feeling in the air.

"Optimus…" Ratchet said quietly, her voice tinged with concern and anger. "You are not expendable. I don't care if it would stop this war dead in its tracks. You can't just sacrifice yourself like that!" Near the end the words were practically a hiss, making Optimus flinch slightly at the admonishment.

"Ratch's right, Op. You need to take bettah care of yaself. We don't wanna lose ya, ya're an important friend to many ah us." Looking to Jazz, Optimus could feel the calm reassurance her presence always brought and finally felt her frame beginning to relax.

"I hate to interrupt, but we've got incoming!" Blaster said as she dashed back into the domed room, one hand on the side of her helm as she took in all the information from her symbiotes.

"Incoming?" Ratchet asked, expression hardening.

"A Decepticon ship just landed outside the temple, I guess they weren't as worried about the signal being a trap as we were." Blaster said as she skidded to a stop in front of Optimus.

Everybot's optics were on her, the question of what to do practically screaming in the silence as even the sparklings began to sense something was wrong and quieted.

"Jetfire, Blurr, Smokescreen, Ratchet, I want you to take the sparklings further into the temple and keep them safe. Currently we have the upper hand, so we'll set up an ambush." Holding out her hand she summoned her axe from subspace but nearly toppled at the unexpected weight on her arm.

There were startled shouts of surprise as Optimus took in the large round shield now attached to her arm. It shimmered in the light as she looked it over curiously, wondering just what it could be made of. She pulled out her blaster and was glad that, at least, was the same as before.

"Autobots," she said firmly, "we hold here! We protect our comrades who are now too small to protect themselves. We will not allow the

Decepticons to overtake us!”

A raucous cheer met her audials and she allowed her battlemask to slip into place.

They would not allow their future to be taken away from them again.

[Megatron]

As the incessant alarm that brought them to the barren planet finally ceased the warlord narrowed his optics at the screen. His mechs had been trying, in vain, to kill the detestable sound for some time now and yet, the moment they arrived, it ceased.

Turning to his second in command he glowered down at the bristling flier, who had been twitchy ever since the alert had begun. “Starscream, take your Seekers out on a patrol. I want to know if there is anything worthwhile on this blasted rock.”

“As you wish, oh mighty leader.” Spat the irate flier before turning on his pede and storming away.

“Soundwave, have you detected anything yet?”

“Negative response; there is nothing on the scanners, Lord Megatron.” His third in command switched between frequencies rapidly, intent on his task.

Megatron stood, hands clasped behind his back, and frowned in contemplation. He had never heard of the kind of alarm that could hack into every system, like a virus, and not be expunged by even the best code breakers. I had even knocked out his third for a time due to it being echoed and amplified by taking over every frequency possible.

It had tapered off a short time ago, as if it was anticipating their arrival, and now it had gone silent.

It was far too suspicious to just leave without finding the source. There was no telling when it would happen again, and what havoc it could cause if they were in the middle of a battle.

But the question remained; had it only attacked the Decepticons communications? Or had it affected the Autobots as well?

He wasn’t certain how long he stood there, running through different scenarios and pondering the origin of the alert, when one of the

bridge crew tried to get his attention.

“My Lord.” Turning to Reflector he nodded at the mech to proceed. “We’re picking up something from the Seekers. It appears to be a structure not too far from here. Your orders?”

“Recall the Seekers, we’ll bring the ship closer to this structure. Assemble a strike force. Soundwave, with me.” He ordered as he turned to leave the bridge.

“Affirmative.”

Whatever this was, whether a trap or not, he was going to get to the bottom of it. If it was a trap? He would make certain that it could never be used against them again.

[Optimus]

Pressing her back into the wall between two pillars the femme did her best to blend with the shadows of the wall. It wasn’t that difficult, after all none of them had time or the resources to paint themselves yet. Only the Autobot insignia remained, the red a bright splash of color on otherwise drab frames.

The sound of heavy pedefalls caught her attention and she steeled herself, pulling her mind inward and calming her racing spark until her presence was smooth like glass.

The moment that a large, dark, yet familiar form passed her she sprang into action. Using the shield on her arm she launched herself forward and up, coming under the mech’s arm as he attempted to swat her away. If she had been larger, like before, her attack wouldn’t have connected, but as she braced herself the shield collided with Megatron’s chin, snapping his helm back. While he was off balance she lunged forward and swept his feet out from under him.

She heard the other Decepticons shout in surprise as the others sprang into action as well.

Megatron’s searing red optics glowered at her and she knew he wasn’t downed. She didn’t have as much strength as before, even if she was faster and more agile now. So she did the only thing she could think of in that moment and threw herself on top of the large mech, pinning him to the floor.

She held her blaster against his helm, blue optics blazing as she

prepared herself for her long time enemy's counter attack.

Megatron's optics widened before narrowing. There was a calculating look on his face as he reached toward her, only to stop when she pressed the blaster harder against his helm.

"Tell your bots to stand down. I will not hesitate to aerate your helm if you do not comply." Something in the back of her processor twinged and she swore she felt the Matrix thrum in her core.

The next moment she found herself flipped onto the ground, her blaster knocked away and shield arm pinned firmly.

Megatron reached up and rubbed at his chin, though his optics never left hers. "Impressive." His voice rumbled through her as his optics fell on her insignia. "But I think you'll find, Autobot, that-"

Before the mech could finish the thought a high pitched wailing could be heard, piercing her processor and making her spark race. Tilting her helm back she spied Bumblebee down the hall. The moment her optics landed on the sparkling she began to struggle frantically against the large mech, everything inside her screaming that she had to protect *her* sparkling.

In a move that she would have to ponder over later, Megatron released her and backed away. She sprang to her feet and raced for her sparkling, who hurried toward her with outstretched arms. Before either of them could get too far Blurr appeared and scooped up Bumblebee, giving her a worried look before she vanished back into the temple.

With her sparkling out of danger she turned to face Megatron once again, squaring her shoulders and raising her shield.

She would defend the hall with the last pulse of her spark and her optics mirrored that resolve.

"Decepticons!" Megatron bellowed, red optics trained on Optimus. "Stand down!"

The command made everybot freeze, Autobots and Decepticons alike.

"Pr- Bossbot?" She heard Jazz call.

"Disengage." She ordered, her voice unwavering.

“But-” Springer started.

“Do as I say.”

A moment later the other femmes, what remained of her Autobot Command, retreated from the Decepticons and came to stand at her back.

Megatron stalked forward a few steps but stopped when Optimus tensed. He made a show of bowing politely and it made her frown in confusion. “I do not believe we have previously met. I am Megatron, leader of the Decepticons. We came in answer to the distress beacon.” His optics trailed over the gathered Autobots for a moment before returning to her. “It was not our intention to scare you, as I’m certain you’ve heard many horror stories about myself and my mechs.” Standing back to his full height he gave her a smile that she would have called charming, if she didn’t know the mech behind it. “Are you still in need of assistance?”

Optimus' mouth fell open behind her battle mask. Was… was Megatron *serious?*

After a moment of stunned silence Optimus lowered her shield. “No, the beacon was activated… accidentally. It took us some time to turn it off again. I… apologize if you went out of your way, but we don’t need any-” A low gurgling sputtering sound could be heard, echoing off the walls, and Optimus turned to look at Blaster.

Her face flushed with color and she shuffled on her feet in embarrassment before shrugging. “I… we’re low on rations and the sparklings…” She hesitantly explained, while also reaching up to press a hand against the holding area of her symbiotes.

Optimus should have known, carriers required more energon than others due to the smaller bots that relied on them to function.

“You are in need of supplies.” Megatron stated, slowly coming closer until he was only a few feet away. “Allow us to aid you. You have a sparkling, yes? If not for yourself then do it for them.”

Optimus wavered for a moment, glancing at Prowl and Jazz. Neither looked thrilled with the idea, but they didn’t oppose it either. She had no doubt they were already formulating a plan of escape.

She turned back to Megatron, looking him directly in the optics. “I will allow you to aid us.” Her voice hardened. “But one wrong move

and we will not hesitate to destroy you. For the same reason I am allowing you to help us. Is that understood?"

Megatron smiled again and her spark began to race in its casing. "Completely."

Optimus nodded and, against her better judgment, turned to lead the Decepticons further into the temple.

"Ah, before we go any further," the mech said, "might I have your designation?"

Optimus froze, opening and closing her mouth for a moment before turning to look back at her foe.

"…Aria." She supplied after a moment. "You may call me Aria."

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> More of Megatron's POV and the beginnings of negotiations between the Autobot femmes and the Decepticon leadership.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Megatron]

Following the group of femmes further into the ancient structure Megatron couldn't help but watch the one who had attacked him, Aria. From the way the others looked to her for commands and reassurance it was clear she was the undisputed leader of the little group.

Imagine his surprise when the first thing to meet him when entering the structure was not his greatest enemy, as he had suspected, but a fierce femme with the courage to take him head on. His jaw still ached from the powerful blow masterfully delivered from beneath his guard. The way she had ducked under his arm and swept his legs out from beneath him when he was off balance- it was safe to say she was a veteran warrior. Yet as he looked over her frame he had to frown at the unfamiliar design.

It was like a perfect blending of civilian and warrior. Her 'weapon' of choice was also quite fascinating. He had not seen a gladiatorial shield like that in quite some time and it seemed to have some hidden tricks as well, if the shimmer along its surface indicated what he thought it did.

A threat to his life was normally something he would not abide. He was the leader of the Decepticons, and very few had ever bested him in combat, but the sheer determination in her optics, the will to go through with her threat, had stalled his processor for a moment. There had been no hatred in her gaze, only purpose, and he wondered why such a femme would go so far.

Then he'd heard the wailing and it clicked into place.

A *sparkling.* And judging from her reaction, going from calm warrior to frantic femme, he inferred that it was *her* sparkling.

The way she had stood in front of that hall, as if she and she alone could stop all of them if her companions failed… it had made something inside him flare with interest.

An interest he'd not felt in eons.

He came out of his contemplation as Aria looked to the femme flanking her on the left. "J-Jive," she seemed to hesitate, glancing back at him momentarily before turning back to the other femme, "please go on ahead and let them know we have a ceasefire. I don't want to scare the little ones."

The visored femme gave Aria a playful salute. "Ya got it, Bossbot." She said before disappearing down a different hall. The accent sounded Polyhexian, but it was buffered by something else. A kind of musical undertone that should have been familiar but wasn't.

Aria turned back to him and he put the information to the back of his processor, for the moment. "There are four others, besides those you see here, and twenty-three sparklings." She said calmly. "I ask that you are careful around them, some of them have… have been through a lot." Her shoulders drooped slightly and for a moment it looked as if all the weight of the cosmos rested upon her back. In the next moment her resolve and determination were back, shoulders squared and emotions set aside for later. "If I see anyone being the slightest bit rough with them, I will eject the perpetrator myself." Her optics flashed and Megatron knew she was serious about her threat.

"We would never seek to harm sparklings." Megatron stated simply. "Warframes care about our young just like any other frametype. If something occurs I can assure you; I will deal with it myself." And he meant every glyph of it.

Aria watched him warily for a moment before something in her frame relaxed. The way her optics shifted and softened he would bet any amount of shanix that she was smiling behind her battle mask.

He briefly wondered if he could convince her to drop the mask but discarded the idea immediately. None of the femmes trusted him and he would be a fool to think that would change any time soon.

They entered a large domed area and Megatron almost froze at the four femmes standing there, protectively hovering over the small swarm of unpainted sparklings.

Something inside his spark ached to see them without a splash of

color, too close to the color of death for comfort. He noted that none of the femmes had any color either and wondered if they had all chosen to get rid of any distinguishing marks or if it was a side effect of something else.

The sparkling from before tried to run toward his caretaker but was stopped by a sharp eyed Praxian femme.

“You really brought the Slagmaker in Chief himself here, didn’t you?” One of the femmes scoffed as she stomped forward. “Who’s injured? I know one of you afthelms is, you always are.”

“R-Rivet!” A particularly large winged femme stuttered, looking scandalized. “Not around young audials!” She looked down at the sparklings, who seemed more interested in the new bots than anything the snappy femme was saying.

Megatron let out a chuckle of amusement before catching Aria staring up at him. The moment their optics met she looked away again.

“I think it would be best for everyone to introduce themselves.” She said as the waved off the femme medic with a gentle voice. “I’m fine, Rivet, check the others first.”

The medical femme pursed her lips for a moment, obviously wanting to argue, but after a moment she let out a heavy vent and stalked toward the other femmes who had been part of the ambush.

“My designation is Pacer.” The Praxian femme standing to Aria’s right stated calmly.

The Carrier spoke next, giving them a jaunty wave, though she held her field in quite close. “Frequency.” He noticed that she did not supply the names of her symbiotes.

The next femme smiled confidently. “Rebound.”

The largest femme ducked her head a little, looking flustered at the sudden attention. “S-Skydancer.”

The next femme let out a small tut as she crossed her arms. “Lectura.”

The femme who had collected Aria’s sparkling earlier shifted from pede to pede, as if trying to disperse her nervous energy. “Afterimage.” It took him a moment to parse out her designation, she’d spoken almost too fast. By the look of her she was a speedster,

potentially Velocitronian.

The sharp eyed Praxian gave them a polite nod, expression carefully neutral. “Mistveil.”

The last femme just kind of shrugged. “I’m Uplift.”

By the time the femmes were finished their introductions his Decepticons had gotten themselves into some kind of order, the shock finally beginning to wear off. At the same time Rivet, the medic, finished whatever repair the confident femme, Rebound, seemed to have and finally stepped away.

The medic glowered at him for a moment before letting out a heavy vent. “Well?” She asked, one hand on her hip and a tool in the other.

“Well what, femme?” Barricade asked in response.

“Well which one of you low processored idiots is injured?” She snapped.

“You… want to fix us?” Breakdown asked, looking from the medic to Barricade and back.

“I’m a medical professional. I won’t leave any bot unattended if I can help it.” She said firmly. “I swore an oath and I intend to keep it.”

Megatron watched his mechs as they mulled over the information.

Finally Barricade shrugged and motioned to his arm. “I’m having trouble moving it.”

Megatron’s optic ridge rose slightly in surprise.

“Hmph. Let’s see what the damage is.” Rivet strode over to the warrior and immediately started running her digits over the appendage. She dug into the shoulder seam and Megatron’s optic ridge rose further when the mech’s face flushed slightly.

“Hey!” His attention was grabbed by a sharp shout and he turned just in time to see Aria’s sparkling break free from the sharp eyed Praxian, Mistveil. The little bot bolted across the room and Aria let out a small fond huff before she knelt and opened her arms for them.

The sparkling let out a series of angry chirps before snuggling against the femme’s chassis. “I know, little one, I’m sorry for scaring you.” She said quietly, voice soft and filled with warmth.

Megatron burned with sudden desire at the sight. It was a future he knew he would never have, back when he was a gladiator, but one he had always craved.

“And who is this?” He asked, keeping his tone light. “I don’t think we’ve been introduced yet.”

Aria looked up at him, almost seeming startled, before she ran her digits over the sparkling’s helm in a calming gesture. “…Hornet. His designation is Hornet, and he may look cute but he is a fierce little fighter.” There was a sense of pride and adoration in her voice and the sparkling responded in kind, sitting up straighter and making happy little chirps.

Large blue optics landed on Megatron and the sparkling made a couple of clicking noises before pointing at him.

“No, little one, I think you should stay right where you are.” Aria chided gently.

Wide blue optics stared up at her and it was only a matter of time before the femme caved under the absolutely devastating stare. She turned to look up at him, optics blazing with protective light. “If he receives even a single scratch…” She let out a harsh vent before stepping closer and holding out the sparkling to him.

The sparkling made more clicking and chirping noises, glancing back at his caretaker. She let out a small chuckle. “Yes, he is very big. No, I don’t think you will be as big when you are older.” The sparkling whined and Aria shook her head in amusement.

Without thinking about what he was doing Megatron held out his servo to the tiny bot. The sparkling reached out and patted his servo, looking fascinated. The little one tried to wriggle out of Aria’s hold to get closer and she let out a low defensive sound, something bordering on a growl, before pulling her sparkling back and away.

“Mistveil, would you take Hornet for me? We should probably begin our discussion on what the… Decepticons might aid us with.”

Without a word the Praxian femme came forward and took Aria’s sparkling, who began to complain the moment he was not in contact with his caretaker.

“I think ah saw a meetin room nearby, Bossbot. We can take care o’ these mechs.” The Polyhexian femme said, pointing toward one of the

arches that led down another hall. “Just through there an then turn left.”

“Thank you, Jive.” Aria turned and looked over her gathered femmes. She seemed to hesitate for a moment. “Lectura, with me. Pacer, you’re in charge until I return.”

As soon as the prim femme joined them Aria turned to him. “If you’ll follow me, Megatron.” She said as she turned away and began walking toward the archway.

His spark flared and his steps almost faltered.

When was the last time anyone had said his designation like that? As if he were an equal. And why, in the Smelter’s name, did he not feel the need to correct her?

[Aria/Optimus]

By grace of her training, and long years at war, she was able to maintain a veneer of calm as she turned her back on her greatest enemy once again and led him further into the temple, their current temporary base. Intermittently she’d felt the Matrix give off pulses of warmth in a manner that felt like approval but otherwise the artifact in her chassis remained dormant.

It was odd, she thought, Megatron was acting far more subdued than she had ever seen him. Even during the tentative ‘peace talks’ of millennia ago the mech had always seemed to have this overwhelming presence that just screamed dominance. But at the moment whatever that presence was had been reigned in, leaving her reeling and confused.

Even Bumblebee, who had more reason than most to be terrified of Megatron, had only expressed a sparkling’s curiosity over the ‘big big mech.’

At least she had confirmation that those who had been reverted back to sparklinghood had no memories of their lives as adult frames. None of them had seemed to have a poor reaction to the Decepticons. Lacking the innate fear of warframes that older bots expressed.

Jazz's quick thinking in warning everyone else they would need to choose new designations was Primus sent. Optim-Aria only hoped the sparklings would take to their new designations as quickly, otherwise they could all be in grave danger.

Entering the room Jive had pointed them to she was glad to see there were chairs large enough for somebot of Megatron's size. Going around the table she took a seat, laying her servos flat on the table.

The mech's optics flicked down to her empty servos and a look of surprise came over him. Perhaps he had not expected someone like her to know anything about Warframes or their different cultures. The gesture itself was such a small thing and yet it seemed to have quite an impact on the large mech.

"Why don't we start this negotiation with what you're actually willing to provide immediately. Then, if we have further needs, I can bring those items to your attention." Her helm tilted slightly as she looked up at him. "Does that sound straight forward enough?"

Megatron leaned back in the chair, interlocking his digits and letting out a contemplative noise. "It is straight forward enough, however, I have one request." There was a gleam in his intelligent optics and Optim-Aria stiffened with wariness.

"No offense to you, Megatron, but I would like to hear it before I agree to anything."

The mech chuckled. "It is nothing sinister, I promise you. It is only; how do you expect me to trust your word when you won't even show your face?" His tone was mild but his optics bore into her intently. "You still look ready for battle with your mask and shield."

"I… suppose that is fair." With a simple motion she subspaced her shield before retracting her battle mask. "Is this better?"

"Quite." She looked up at the warlord and something in his presence seemed almost… pleased.

"Then please proceed. What sort of aid are you offering us?" She waved at Perceptor, now Lectura, and the other femme pulled out a pad to take notes on.

Megatron sat up straighter. "For starters, we can provide you with Energon."

Chapter End Notes

New Designations

Femmes;
(New, Old)

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Rivet- Ratchet
Pacer- Prowl
Jive- Jazz
Rebound- Springer
Mistveil- Smokescreen
Frequency- Blaster
Uplift- Wheeljack
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire
Afterimage- Blurr

Sparklings;
(New, Old)

Hornet- Bumblebee
Swiftstrike- Sideswipe
Sunspot- Sunstreaker
Whisper- Bluestreak
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot
Hopper- Cliffjumper
Flashfire- Hot Rod
Steelspark- Ironhide
Figment- Mirage
Ace- Arcee
Steadfast- Hound
Brightflare- Inferno
Siren- Red Alert
Outburst- Broadside
Dusty- Sandstorm
Stalwart- Roadbuster
Twirl- Topspin
Twist- Twin Twist

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

I'll be posting this every chapter, just in case you guys need to refer back to it.

Autobots;
Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Rivet- Ratchet
Pacer- Prowl
Jive- Jazz
Rebound- Springer
Mistveil- Smokescreen
Frequency- Blaster
Uplift- Wheeljack
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire
Afterimage- Blurr

Hornet- Bumblebee
Swiftstrike- Sideswipe
Sunspot- Sunstreaker
Whisper- Bluestreak
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot
Hopper- Cliffjumper
Flashfire- Hot Rod
Steelspark- Ironhide
Figment- Mirage
Ace- Arcee
Steadfast- Hound
Brightflare- Inferno
Siren- Red Alert
Outburst- Broadside
Dusty- Sandstorm
Stalwart- Roadbuster
Twirl- Topspin
Twist- Twin Twist

[Rivet/Ratchet]

Watching Optimus leave with Megatron made all of Ratchet's renewed circuits twinge with worry. Enough that he… she could feel her Amica reaching out to envelop her spark in warmth like a physical hug. A small smile crossed her face as she stepped away from the Con she had been working on. "Better?" She asked with a critical optic as the mech lifted and rotated the arm at the shoulder.

"Huh. Much better." The mech stared at her for a moment before giving her a small grateful smile. "Where'd you learn to work on Warframes, femme?"

Ratchet stiffened, optics narrowing slightly. He… she knew that Barricade wasn't just a simple enforcer. He was smarter than most gave him credit for, but not her.

She'd been online longer than any of them knew, save perhaps Optimus or Skyfire.

Putting a hand on her hip she glowered at him and brandished the wrench in her hand. She would have to talk fast if she wanted to throw off any suspicion. "I used to work in a neutral clinic, the head medic there would take in anyone who was injured no matter what side they were on or frametype they were created with. Not that I think it's any business of yours, mech." Once again she felt a gentle warmth from her Amica, underlaid with a feeling of concern.

"No offense meant, femme. Just curious." The mech said, raising his servos in a defensive gesture in front of his chassis.

"Hmph." Turning away from Barricade she took in the others that Megatron had brought with him and had to force herself to keep a neutral expression. Or at least a disgruntled one. The old Slagmaker must have seen the Wrecker's ship and decided to bring the big guns. Standing awkwardly, where Megatron had left them, were the Constructicons. Scrapper, Bonecrusher, Scavenger, Mixmaster, Hook, and Long Haul were all watching the sparklings with mixed interest. Nearby Breakdown was going between looking at Knock Out nervously and watching the sparklings with something approaching wonder. Meanwhile Knock Out was still standing speechless, optics wide as he stared at the femmes and sparklings.

That was a lot of crazy to bring on a mission and leave alone with 'the enemy.'

“Steelspark!” Came the stern voice of Smokescreen. “Do not pounce on Windsweeper!”

Turning to see what was going on Ratchet rolled her optics. Ironhide had decided that Air Raid wasn’t paying enough attention to their game, it seemed, and had pounced on the larger sparkling. Of course this meant that the rest of the Aerialbots had taken notice and flocked to protect their bonded brother.

Fireflight, who had been climbing on Skyfire, jumped off as if to dive bomb the tough little grounder.

“I’ve got them, Mistveil.” Skyfire said as she scooped Fireflight out of the air and picked up a sniffling Air Raid. “Reverie, no diving. You could hurt yourself.” The large femme scolded with all the gentle grace of a seasoned caretaker.

Ratchet was going to get a helmache trying to keep all of their new designations straight.

“Why are none of you concerned about your paint!?” Knock Out finally said in exasperation. “Look at you all! You’re so- so- drab!”

Ratchet snorted in amusement. Wheeljack just looked at the fussy Decepticon and shrugged nonchalantly in that almost infuriatingly blasé manner of his… hers.

“It’s not like we have any paint lying around here to work with. Trust me mech, if we had any paint we would have given the little ones some color first thing.” Ratchet could feel how disturbed her Amica was at the idea of gray sparkling frames.

A sentiment she shared but was carefully ignoring for her own sanity. She’d seen enough dead frames, sparkling frames, in her function to last for an eternity. She had no desire to see more.

“Uh, hate-to-interrupt.” Blurr said, helm on a swivel as their optics swept across the sparklings. “Has-anybot-seen-Figment?”

Ratchet felt her spark grow cold as they all quickly took a count of the sparklings.

One was missing.

“If Figment is with one of you, mechs, I hope to Primus you hand them over quickly.” Ratchet’s optics went wide with surprise as

something cold washed through her frame. She turned toward Skyfire, who'd been the one to make the threat, and for the first time in a long time realized that the gentle scientist was, in fact, quite large. Large and imposing as she stood at her full height, though it wasn't enough to tower over the larger Decepticons.

"Remain calm, Skydancer. I know your caretaker programming is overworked right now, but I've been keeping an optic on them and they have not interacted with the sparklings." Prowl said carefully. "I'm certain that he is nearby."

"Steadfast." Prowl turned to look down at the sparkling that had once been Hound. The newly made femme smiled gently, something Ratchet had only ever seen her do when around the twins or Jazz, and ran her digits over the little mech's helm. "Can you find Figment for me? I know you're very good at finding things."

The little mech chirped an affirmative and walked a few paces away before stopping and going almost unnaturally still. His blue-green optics seemed to gleam as he took in everything around him before chirping again and pointing toward one of the pillars. He looked up at Prowl and chirped again, more insistently this time.

"Thank you, Steadfast. You did a very good job." Prowl said as she rose and walked over to the pillar the sparkling had indicated.

Although walking wasn't quite right anymore. No. The Praxian almost seemed to glide across the floor. Rather than a predator stalking their prey the femme looked regal and graceful.

"Figment. Come out now, please. You gave Skydancer a scare and owe her an apology." Prowl stood with hands on hips and looked down at the pillar, doorwings twitching slightly.

Ratchet had to hold back a curse as the sparkling almost seemed to materialize before her very optics.

A sparkling… shouldn't have that kind of ability. While Mirage had specialty mods installed early into the war he was currently a sparkling and had no space, let alone the hardware, for that sort of thing.

Which meant that his ability to cloak himself was no longer a mod.

He was an Outlier.

[Aria/Optimus]

“For starters, we can provide you with Energon.” Megatron said evenly. “Although it is not configured for sparkling consumption it wouldn’t be hard to dilute it down and find the right additives. There are many under my banner who have special needs due to their place of origin or unique modifications.”

Aria wasn’t surprised. For all that Megatron was a warlord he had accepted anyone who wished to join his cause. In all their time as enemies she had noticed that any prisoners they’d taken had looked quite healthy, despite whatever wounds needed to be treated in the medical bay after the fighting was over. Ratchet had never had to give any of them an infusion except medical grade energon to promote healing.

“I’m certain that once Rivet has looked over the sparklings she will have a proper list of their current needs to share with whoever you have as your current quartermaster.” Aria said politely. “Lectura,” she turned to the scientist, who looked up from her notes, “you know how to safely dilute and modify energon, correct?”

“I do, P-Aria. I’m certain Rivet and I can work with whomever is assigned from the Decepticons to be our overseers, since I assume we wouldn’t be left to our own devices.” Lecura reached up as if to adjust the monocle she used to have before realizing it was gone and lowering her servo.

Out of he corner of her optic she saw Megatron’s gaze narrow slightly. A shiver of worry ran through her frame but she kept her expression polite and impassive.

“I’ll be sure to assign someone who is willing to work with your bots without being disruptive or combative.” The large mech said easily. “After all, this is for the little ones. Regardless of your faction, sparklings are our future.” There was a weight to his glyphs as his crimson optics shifted to regard Aria carefully.

“Thank you, Megatron, for now that is all we will require. What is it you-”

“If I might make a suggestion?” The warlord interrupted.

Aria’s optics narrowed with suspicion. “Go on.”

“You need paint.” He said firmly, optics scanning both of their frames

before flicking back up to meet Aria's. "Regardless of faction, seeing bots walking around in a color so similar to that of sparkless frames is frankly disturbing. Especially the sparklings." There was a hint of something in his tone, the way his optics twitched slightly, that made Aria wonder if it was really Megatron who was disturbed by it.

An odd thought about someone who was colloquially known as the Slagmaker.

"Energon for the sparklings and paint then." Lectura said beside her. "And what will that cost us, Sir Megatron?" Her blue optics were sharp as she stared across the table at the large mech.

"I am certain we can come to a mutually beneficial agreement." An amused smirk crossed his face before his expression turned more contemplative. "What can you femmes do for my faction, I wonder?" There was almost a playfulness to his voice now.

Lectura bristled next to her and Aria held out her servo as she opened her mouth to reply. The other femme looked at her, frame stiff with anger, but Aria shook her head. She let out a vent and sat back slightly, offended but willing to let her Prime handle the situation.

"Among our number we have a tactician, a medical trained professional, a communications specialist, two scientists, an inventor, a courier, a psychologist, a musician, and two warriors. Which are myself and Rebound." She stared him in the optics, waiting to see what he would do.

"Hm." The mech quietly mulled over the information for a moment. "We have no need for a musician, psychologist, courier, or an inventor. But I'm certain we can find other tasks that they might be able to perform in exchange."

"Are you suggesting that-" Lectura began.

"Lectura. Stand down." Aria said firmly, voice only slightly raised above the other femme's outburst. She turned towards Megatron, optics like precious crystals as they shone with inner strength. "I will not allow my companions to be taken advantage of, Megatron. I know you are a mech of your word, and although I disagree with the way you govern your faction I know you to be a mech of honor in some respects."

The mech's optics bore into hers as he stared her down. Yet oddly she did not feel threatened by it. The fact that he was listening so intently

meant he was taking her seriously.

“I do not believe you mean to suggest we use our frames as a means of payment. Even if I am mistaken, and that is what you are suggesting, I will tell you right now- that option is not on the table. Nor is it up for debate.” She sat straighter, shoulders squared and helm held high. “My femmes will not be coerced. Do you understand me?”

[Megatron]

It was fascinating how easy it was for Aria to command those who followed her. The first time the other femme had reacted to his words all it took was a simple raised servo and small shake of the helm to stop her in her tracks.

The make up of the femme’s team was quite odd, if you didn’t take into account the majority of them were civilian frames with battle upgrades. Why would they need a tactician, two scientists, and a comms specialist? The psychologist and medical professional made sense, they were taking care of sparklings after all, but a tactician? Was there a reason for the odd mix of femmes or was it that they had all been thrown together by circumstances out of their servos?

Aria’s words rang in his audials.

She thought he was honorable? A mech of his word?

He’d styled his comments to get a rise out of her, to test her reaction, but this was not what he’d expected. The fact that she believed he hadn’t meant his words in the more degenerate form they could be taken in had him blinking in shock.

He cleared his intake. “You are correct to assume it was not meant in that manner.” He clarified. “We have many manual labor positions open and other errands that could use extra servos. I assure you that I do not condone that kind of violence, regardless of what others might say about my warriors. If I find one of my warriors has committed such an act they are imprisoned, tried, and executed for their crime.”

No, Megatron would never condone forcing someone into a berth. His early days as a Gladiator flashed behind his optics and his servos clenched against the table. He knew what it felt like to lose the ability to choose, to have the safety of knowing ones frame belonged only to oneself taken away and crushed under pede.

Aria’s crystal blue optics dropped to his servos for a moment before

her expression darkened. Her servo twitched as if she wanted to reach out but she refrained. Instead she looked up into his optics and gave him a smile that in another bot he would call pity but on her he would call sympathy. “We would be happy to perform labor tasks in exchange for the sparkling grade energon and paint. If that is all you wanted to suggest?”

“Unless you have a store of weapons hidden somewhere in this temple I don’t believe you have anything else to offer, do you?” He said with a chuckle.

Aria rolled her optics before she froze, cheeks reddening from embarrassment. “Then we have a deal.” Standing she held out her strong servo to him, palm facing the table.

Megatron’s processor was racing as he stood and reached out his own servo, palm up, to grip her arm in the Kaonian form of agreement. Her digits curled around his wrist, all that she could realistically reach, and they shook on the deal. He hesitated to release her for a moment and heard her make a small noise of confusion. His optics were trained on their clasped arms before he looked back into her optics. “You seem to have some interesting knowledge at your disposal.” He said as he released her. “I have never known of an Autobot who understood Kaonite etiquette.”

Aria nibbled on her bottom derma for a moment before seeming to remember she had retracted her battle mask and stopped. “I… used to spend copious amounts of time in the Archives.” She explained, tone almost shy.

“You were an archivist?” Now that was certainly a surprise, although a welcome one.

It only made his interest grow.

“Ahem.” The other femme interrupted them as she also stood. “I believe that with the negotiation finalized we should begin working on the logistics. We-” Suddenly the femme twitched slightly, helm canting to the side as if listening to something. Likewise Aria reached up to tap at the side of her helm, nodding to whatever was being said on the other end of the transmission.

“Is there a problem?” He asked, raising an optic ridge in question.

“Only a small incident. One of the sparklings disappeared momentarily. Figment likes playing hiding games, he caused a bit of

fuss before he was found. But he's safe and back with the others now."

He was surprised that the sharp opticed femmes could lose one of the sparklings but with his warriors standing nearby he knew their attention must be split. He reminded himself that they didn't know that the Decepticons would never hurt a sparkling. At least not yet.

"Well, since we're finished here we might as well-"

His comm crackled. ||My Lord!||

||What is it Barricade?||

||You need to return immediately. Starscream and his Trine are here and causing a disturbance.|| The mech reported quickly.

Megatron cursed internally. ||We'll be there momentarily.||

Looking at the sudden fierce looks on the femmes faces he assumed they'd also been contacted about his second in command. Letting out a harsh vent of frustration he waved toward the door. "I believe that is our cue to return. It appears my second in command is making a nuisance of himself. He will be dealt with the moment I arrive, I assure you."

There was a small flash of appreciation on Aria's face before she nodded. Her battle mask slid back into place but he thought he could still hear her mutter, "why is he even in the chain of command to begin with?"

Megatron let out a snort of amusement but didn't reply as they turned and headed back to the main chamber of the temple.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Aria/Optimus]

Even before they came into the main atrium where they'd left their respective groups Aria could hear a loud shrieking that was just on the edge of being too much for her audials to handle. Lectura looked at her with wide optics, wincing as the noise became louder.

She couldn't see his face but ahead of them she thought she could hear Megatron muttering something about 'that cursed shrieking half-glitch,' which was not inaccurate.

The situation they came upon would have been more alarming if it wasn't so comical. Thundercracker and Skywarp seemed to be keeping everybot at bay while Starscream bristled and shrieked in what had to be High Vosnian, since Aria could only understand about half of what he was saying. The mech was half crouched over the sparkling Aerialbots, keeping them within his sight, as Skydancer calmly replied in the same language.

She was able to catch parts of the conversation as they came closer and she almost stopped in surprise. "-protect them- small and fragile- need to learn- Vos culture- no one left to teach- take them under wing- *proper* flying!" It almost sounded as if Starscream was trying to adopt the Aerialbots. A thought that was as interesting as it was alarming.

For each point that was raised Skydancer countered with her own. "- we are protecting them- yes, nestlings are small and fragile- yes, they need to learn- of course- I can teach them- you cannot- they are not Seekerlings."

The last one seemed to really get under Starscream's plating as he stood to his full height and hissed something defensive.

"Enough!" Came Megatron's booming voice, startling everyone into reaching for their weapons.

Not wanting to have this devolve into fighting Aria stepped up next to Megatron. "Stand down! I will not have weapons being drawn in the presence of the sparklings." She said with all the authority she

possessed.

It must have said something about her years leading the Autobots when even the Decepticons followed her order without a fuss, although they did turn to their own leader for confirmation.

“Skydancer, since Starscream is only capable of speaking High Vosnian at the moment would you please explain what he is shouting about to those who can’t understand?”

Skydancer looked to Starscream, who was venting harshly and still refused to step away from the Aerialbots. Thankfully the group of young fliers just looked fascinated by his wings and were chirping amongst themselves.

“Starscream and his Trine came this way when something about the temple felt familiar to him. After they entered he demanded to see Lord Megatron before he noticed the sparklings. I… can’t say exactly what triggered it but I believe the, um, Protocol, hit him hard.” Skydancer said with some embarrassment.

“Protocol?” Megatron asked beside her, looking suspicious.

Aria rubbed at her forehelm in exasperation. “The Protocol was embedded in the signal that was sent out before we were able to shut it down. It seems to be an ancient failsafe from Cybertron pertaining to the immediate protection of all sparklings. Not everybot is going to respond to it in this manner but Seekers have always been especially keen on the welfare of sparklings. It comes from their ancient roots when, during a plague, a virus hit their population and took half of their young in one fell swoop.” Aria sighed, saddened by the loss of life even though it had happened ages ago. “Since then, to preserve their frametype, their coding adapted to consider all sparklings worthy of protection, although they of course have more of an affinity for flight capable young.” She motioned to the Aerialbots that were still hanging around the older flier’s pedes. “Since there are enough femmes here considered ‘able’ to take care of the non-flight capable young his coding considers it his Trine’s right to take the sparklings and teach them properly as Fliers of Vos.”

Pausing in her explanation she saw the looks of shock shared equally by Autobot and Decepticon alike. She could practically feel Megatron’s gaze on her and she was glad she’d pulled her battle mask up so no one could see the slight flush of embarrassment on her cheeks.

Why was everyone always so surprised by her knowledge? She’d been

an Archivist, for Primus' sake.

"Is it their right?" Asked Uplift, looking curious.

"If we were on Cybertron and the sparklings were orphaned like now, then yes. The Winglord and his Trine would be well within their right to claim any orphaned flier for Vos. Especially if they were a Seekerling."

"Pr-Aria is correct." Skydancer said, stuttering over her proper title but quickly correcting herself before she could let Optimus' true designation slip. "But we are not on Cybertron. Starscream has no jurisdiction here. Which means I will be teaching them." Her tone was calm yet firm.

Aria waited for Sarscream to start shrieking again, demanding that Skydancer obey him due to his station as Winglord, but after the two stared one another down the flight framed mech seemed to take a mental step back. The mech's optics looked over the shuttle, as if seeing her in a new light, before he spoke once more. "If you were Trined I would consider that a challenge." He said primly, puffing himself up as Thundercracker and Skywarp gave each other exasperated looks behind him. "My Trine will train them to fly."

Well… at least he was speaking a more common language now, and in a more appropriate tone of voice as well.

"I will not retract my claim. You are second in command of the Decepticons, you do not have the time to devote to raising sparklings or giving them the attention they need. Not to mention the fact they are Autobot sparklings." Skydancer said calmly in return.

Aria looked up at Megatron and saw his expression turn thoughtful. Whether it was the kind of thoughtful that would benefit them or not she couldn't be sure.

"Seeing as we," Megatron motioned toward her then back to himself, "have come to a mutual beneficial agreement, which would see our two groups working closely with one another for the foreseeable future, I see no reason why Starscream cannot aid you in teaching the little ones." The large mech looked to her. "Unless you have some objection?"

Aria looked up at Megatron before turning toward her Autobots. It had always been her wish to unite all of Cybertron and here Megatron was offering the opening she needed to take the first step toward her

dream. Of course it meant that Starscream, of all mechs, would be working closely with her team but… was this not what Chrono had activated the Protocol for? So that the destruction of Cyberton and their remaining people could be halted? It would be a good opportunity to judge for herself if the two factions could learn to live with one another.

After a moment of contemplation she nodded. “I agree, in the interest of cooperation. However, as I said earlier, I will not allow the sparklings to be around violence, and I want one of their caretakers with them at all times.” Her optics bore into Megatron’s, the depth of her emotions clear despite the battle mask she wore.

“An understandable compromise.” The other leader declared simply, giving her a polite nod of acknowledgment that was both surprising but not, seeing as he had been nothing short of a gentlemech since he had introduced himself. “I will have Soundwave prepare a list of all those who would be safe around the sparklings, as well as who will be working with your scientist to make the sparkling-grade energon.” He said simply.

Aria smiled, feeling relieved. “I’d appreciate that greatly, Megatron. Please send it to… oh, I suppose we haven’t exchanged comms frequencies, have we?” Not being able to contact one another directly would make coordinating a bit difficult.

Megatron went carefully still, his optics narrowing slightly, before he held out his hand and a notification pinged inside her helm. It was what appeared to be a personal frequency sent by the large mech in question.

After carefully studying it with the many detection programs she had at her disposal she accepted the frequency before sending her own back. With a connection established between the two of them they would be able to communicate instantly, rather than have to go through their respective communications officers.

“I hope that is sufficient?” The mech asked, one brow raised.

Aria couldn’t help but snort in amusement. “Quite, thank you Megatron. It will certainly make this exchange easier.” Hearing a scoff she glanced over at the still gathered Decepticons. “Seeing as the sparklings have had an… eventful cycle, I think it’s about time for you and your mechs to head back. Once the excitement has calmed down I will contact you with my own list. If that is acceptable to you, of

course.”

Megatron stood there watching her for a moment, no doubt trying to gauge her sincerity, before he took a step back and gave her another stately bow. “I look forward to receiving your missive. Until the next time we meet, Aria.”

Before she could even fathom a response the mech had turned to his warriors and ordered them back to the Nemesis.

Once they were gone Rivet stormed over, looking as if she were about to blow a gasket, and grabbed her arm before hissing; “we have a problem!”

“What? Are the sparklings okay?” It was the first thought on her mind, especially since Figment had disappeared earlier before quickly being found.

“They’re fine except for the fact that Mirage is now an Outlier!” Rivet stated, voice trembling slightly with nerves and concern.

“But- how?” She couldn’t help asking.

“I don’t know, Prime, and that’s what has me worried.” Together they glanced over at the sparklings, who were once again running around and playing now that all the excitement was over.

"We'll get to the bottom of this, Rivet. But regardless of whether or not any of them are Outliers I swear to you- we will treat them no differently. There will be no shame or grief here, only acceptance and love." It didn't matter what obstacles she had to face, Aria swore on the Matrix that she would give the sparklings a bright future, no matter the personal cost.

[Megatron]

As his advanced team returned to the Nemesis, Megatron’s processor was going over everything he had observed of the strange Autobot femmes. But the more he tried to focus on the little details the more his mind wandered back to their leader, Aria. There was something about the way she quietly commanded he attention of the others that felt vaguely familiar to him, something he could not put his digit on currently, but whatever it was had certainly caught his attention.

Unfortunately his thoughts were interrupted now and then by the hissing and whining of his second in command as he complained

about the large flier femme.

“I am the Winglord of Vos! She can’t just- just- disregard my claim like that!” He hissed and spat at his trine mates.

Thundercracker looked as unfazed as ever, not even attempting to calm his leader, while a wide grin spread across Skywarp’s face. “You could always just court her. We both know you have a thing for shutt-” Starscream let out an indignant squawk and slammed a servo over his trine mate’s face, stopping him from saying anything more.

Megatron decided to ignore anything further from the fliers unless they caused any actual trouble. He had no desire to learn about his second’s… preferences. The very thought made him shudder in disgust.

Instead he returned to his contemplation of the Autobot femme.

The way she’d fought suggested she knew battle, and the steady look in her optics when her blaster was against his helm told him that she was a veteran warrior with a strong spark. But it was the way she spoke and led her group that was far more telling than her actions during their short scuffle. The respect she received from the other femmes was clearly returned in how she listened to them and regarded their words carefully. Yet when she gave a command it was obeyed quickly and with trust. Her skill at looking past the obvious was clearly gleaned from her time as an archivist, a tidbit he was certain she'd let slip by accident.

There was also the fact that she seemed to believe he was a mech of honor who would keep his word, despite the propaganda that had smeared him as a cruel barbarian with a taste for energon and all kinds of debauchery.

All in all the femme was an enigma, an intriguing mystery he wished to unravel.

By the time he stepped back on the bridge of the Nemesis he had already made his decision.

“Soundwave, I have new orders. Orders that are sure to cause a stir. I need you to focus entirely on the internal matters until this situation calms down.”

“Affirmative. Query; what kind of situation?”

“Let’s just say, we have some new temporary allies who may not remain so temporary if I have my way.”

Chapter End Notes

Autobots;
Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Rivet- Ratchet
Pacer- Prowl
Jive- Jazz
Rebound- Springer
Mistveil- Smokescreen
Frequency- Blaster
Uplift- Wheeljack
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire
Afterimage- Blurr

Sparklings;
Hornet- Bumblebee
Swiftstrike- Sideswipe
Sunspot- Sunstreaker
Whisper- Bluestreak
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot
Hopper- Cliffjumper
Flashfire- Hot Rod
Steelspark- Ironhide
Figment- Mirage
Ace- Arcee
Steadfast- Hound
Brightflare- Inferno
Siren- Red Alert
Outburst- Broadside
Dusty- Sandstorm
Stalwart- Roadbuster
Twirl- Topspin
Twist- Twin Twist

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Autobots;
Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Rivet- Ratchet
Pacer- Prowl
Jive- Jazz
Rebound- Springer
Mistveil- Smokescreen
Frequency- Blaster
Uplift- Wheeljack
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire
Afterimage- Blurr

Sparklings;
Hornet- Bumblebee
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Steadfast- Hound
Brightflare- Inferno
Siren- Red Alert
Outburst- Broadside
Dusty- Sandstorm
Stalwart- Roadbuster
Twirl- Topspin
Twist- Twin Twist

[Aria/Optimus]

After Rivet and Mistveil finished checking over the sparklings they discovered that Figment wasn't the only one with a newfound Outlier ability.

"From what we're been able to ascertain through tests and a series of simple questions it appears that at least three of the sparklings have some kind of ability that is outside of the norm, besides Figment." Mistveil looked at Rivet, who sighed.

"We'll get the simplest ones out of the way. Steelspark's armor plating is twice as strong as it should logically be considering the materials it is made from. I suspect that he also has an abundance of hyper-active nanites. On the other servo we have Steadfast, who can now detect spark signatures even behind thick walls." The medic motioned back to the psychologist to continue.

"Most alarming is Siren. After testing I found he is able to pick up on the thoughts of those around him." The femme's expression didn't change but the way she gripped the datapad was enough for Aria to know she was concerned. "I think there may be more we aren't picking up on but at this time the sparklings are too underdeveloped to get a good idea of what those abilities may be."

As Mistveil and Rivet finished their report Aria shuttered her optics and let out a heavy sigh. "We'll start with the most concerning case first." She turned to look at Mistveil. "Do you believe this is a newly acquired ability? Or do you believe it was something before the… reformat." It was the most delicate and least suspicious way to refer to their sudden transformation.

"Looks like you already have your suspicions so I won't waste time; I think Siren, or rather Red Alert, always had this ability. It's the most probable cause of his chronic paranoia. What most thought of as a glitch was actually an Outlier ability that no one really understood. It's no wonder he was so paranoid if he was constantly hearing unknown voices whispering in the back of his processor." The femme shook her helm, looking frustrated.

Rivet reached over and put a servo on her shoulder in comfort. "It's not your fault. You worked hard with Red to keep him as stable as possible."

Aria waited a moment, allowing her psychologist a moment to collect herself and soak in the comfort the rough medic was willing to give. "Do you have an idea for how to help him cope with this ability?" She

didn't add 'this time,' assuming it was implied.

"Having Brightflare around is helping. With such a calm, steady, and honest presence helping to make him feel safe he has someone to buffer others thoughts and anchor himself with. Although he's not doing it consciously." Mistveil sighed, tapping her stylus against the top of the datapad while she thought. "The only suggestion I have is… well, to find another telepath and ask them about healthy coping mechanisms or ways to control it." The femme frowned.

"There's only one mech I can think of who can pull thoughts directly from a bot's processor, and you want to ask him to help us with a vulnerable sparkling?" Lectura asked with a look of horror.

"We really don't have many options, not if we want to ensure the health and wellbeing of the sparkling in question." Mistveil said firmly. "Do you have a better suggestion?"

Aria crossed her arms, cocking her hip slightly as she thought over the information presented to her. "I've already made the stipulation that any interaction between the sparklings and the Decepticons must be monitored by an Autobot. But I'm not sure about allowing Siren near the Decepticons is a good idea when he can't control his ability." She shook her head at the very thought. Who knew what kind of very uncomfortable or violent thoughts the young one might overhear. It would be better to keep him away from the Decepticons for the time being. "Perhaps one of us could contact him and ask a couple of questions. We might have to reveal why we're asking, but at least Siren won't be exposed to them if one of us goes instead." She suggested, optics shifting from one femme to the next to judge their reactions.

Mistveil pursed her derma, looking down at her datapad once more. "I think that idea has merit. But if we send one of us there is a much higher chance of being discovered for who we were before the… reformat." She warned. "It would have to be someone with resistance or an immunity to having their thoughts read. The only femmes I can think of are perhaps myself or Afterimage. Myself because I have the mental training to stave off such things and Afterimage because her thoughts run so fast they would be difficult to decrypt."

Lectura glanced between them all. "You're not actually thinking of sending someone to ask Soundwave, of all mechs, for help?"

Aria sighed but it was Rivet who spoke. "That's exactly what they're

thinking, and I can't even fault them for it." She snapped. "He is probably the only one who could understand the pitfalls and help us avoid them with Siren. Even if he's a fra-" she growled and caught herself, "weird mech."

She inclined her helm toward the medic. "The question is this- who do we send? I don't want to put anyone in danger if I can help it, but we're already at a disadvantage."

"I'll do it." Startling she turned to see Frequency standing just to her left, looking sheepish. "I couldn't help but overhear." She shrugged, unashamed of her highly attuned sensors.

"I'm afraid to say it, but you don't have the training. What makes you think you can pull this off?" Mistveil asked, not unkindly.

"You don't need to worry about that. There's less risk for me since I…" the femme took a deep vent before letting it out, bolstering herself. "I can change the wavelength of my thought processes at will." She said the last part quickly, as if she were ripping off a nanite patch.

"You're an Outlier?" Rivet asked, looking completely unprepared for the revelation. "Bl-Frequency, why didn't you say anything? That information is important for a medic to know!"

The femme fidgeted in place, optics finding the ground as she shrugged. "I just… the time never seemed right and I've never had a reason to say anything about it before." It was obvious that she was uncomfortable revealing the information, even now.

Reaching over Aria carefully set a servo on the communication specialist's shoulder, giving it a gentle squeeze of reassurance. "Thank you for trusting us. I know that must have been difficult for you to divulge. Your trust will not be misplaced, no one here will judge you for your gift." She reassured, tone firm with conviction.

Frequency looked her in the optics for a long moment before smiling and recovering some of her usual cheer. "Thank you, Pr-Aria." She looked to the others and stood a little straighter. "So how about it? You think it would work?"

Mistveil looked conflicted but nodded. "It should work. But he's going to be suspicious of you. We should work on some pre-determined thoughts you can 'let slip' to cover up your ability. If the- if Aria approves."

Aria smiled and retracted her hand from Frequency's shoulder. "I have every confidence in the both of you."

As the two began talking over how to deceive one of the top ranked Decepticons Aria received a message. Checking the sender she was surprised to see it was from Megatron, with Soundwave's signature attached. Turning away from the group she scanned it for any potential spyware before opening it and reading over the contents.

Inside was a list of all Decepticons deemed 'safe' to be around the sparklings and a work roster including which mechs they could report to for work shifts. It included two to three shift options for each of the femmes, which was a bit surprising but very welcome. It meant that some of them could remain behind and watch the sparklings, some of them could go and get their paint done, and some of them could work a shift with the Decepticons. There were even suggested sections each femme could choose to work from. Like medical, repair, or inventory. A couple of them were specifically requested, for certain tasks, like Rivet and Lectura, but that was perfectly logical considering their specialties.

Turning back to the group of femmes she cleared her intake to catch their attention. "Autobots, I have our first assignments."

[Megatron]

Standing at the base of the ramp leading to the interior of the *Nemesis*, clawed servos comfortably linked behind his back, Megatron pointedly ignored the low hissing and squabbling of the three Seekers beside him. Sadly they were integral to his current plans or he would have sent them away the moment Starscream began to twitch.

"C'mon, Star! Just be happy you get to play with the-" The chirping sound Sywarp used was clearly a word in a foreign dialect he did not understand, but was most probably what Aria had called High Vosnian. Strange that they would be speaking it now when he was fairly certain Starscream hadn't spoken it in decivorns. It was as if seeing the sparklings had flipped a switch in the fussy mech.

"The :chirp: should already be in our care!" His second in command squawked indignantly while Thundercracker looked up at the stars, as if asking a distant Primus for patience.

"I don't think that the femme in charge is going let you steal the :chirp: from her." Thundercracker interjected. "But if you prove you'd be a better :three-note-trill: than that shuttle femme then maybe you

can convince her to give them to us."

"I will remind you all that if you even attempt to snatch the sparklings away from the Autobot femmes that I will be obligated to punish you accordingly." He said calmly, though his blazing red optics were anything but as he glowered at the flighty Seekers.

All three of them froze in place, as if just remembering he was standing there. Starscream scowled but nodded jerkily at him in understanding.

"We're not talking about stealing them!" Skywarp spoke up quickly, glancing between the other two Seekers. "Just convincing the femmes to let us keep them cause we'd be good :three-note-trill:!"

Starscream scoffed. "He doesn't know what that means." The mech crossed his arms imperiously, rolling his optics. "Very few outside of Vos speak High Vosnian, even if they speak the more common dialect."

"Oh… but didn't that shuttle femme and important femme know what you were saying?"

Starscream sighed in exasperation. "That shuttle femme was clearly from Vos and many academics learn to speak High Vosnian as part of their studies. The other one, however… is far more unusual." Helm tilting slightly the Seeker actually seemed to be contemplating the oddity of Aria knowing how to speak a language that was exclusive to Vos.

"She was an Archivist." Megatron interrupted with confidence. "She mentioned it once during our negotiations and again in the rotunda."

Starscream scoffed. "Just because she was a glorified data compiler doesn't mean she should be able to speak High Vosnian." The mech smirked, glancing over at him. "Maybe she has a flight framed lover tucked away somewhere."

Megatron glowered at his second in command, trying not to show his annoyance at the very suggestion.

"I see them." Thundercracker said suddenly, cutting through the tense atmosphere. "No wonder it took them so long, they're on pede."

Shifting his focus toward the group of femmes he counted four adult frames and eight smaller ones. Amongst them was Aria with her

sparkling cradled in one arm and another ground frame in the other. The second he recognized as the femme who had taken notes during the negotiations. The third was a femme he had only seen once, the Carrier, and taking up the rear was the shuttle femme with five of the flight framed sparklings cradled against her chassis.

Once they were within speaking distance Megatron stepped forward to greet them, before Starscream could start acting cocky and arrogant. “Aria, it is a pleasure to see you again so soon.” He said with a smile. “Knock Out is already waiting in a room set aside for your group.”

Although the femme had her mask obscuring the lower half of her face he could tell she was smiling. “The pleasure is mine, Megatron. I speak for all of us when I say that we will be relieved when all of the little ones are sporting new colors.”

“I couldn’t agree more. If you’ll come this way?” He motioned toward the ramp and smirked when the femme didn’t even hesitate. Judging by the way she held herself it was not a lack of fear that had her striding forward so confidently, but necessity.

The others were a little less enthused to be entering the *Nemesis* but his focus was primarily on Aria. Behind him he could hear Starscream speaking to the shuttle femme, the strange warbles and trills sounding just as grating as his normal speech. Next to him Aria let out a chuckle.

“Something amusing?” He asked, looking down at her smaller frame as they entered the landing bay.

“I just never thought I’d see myself entering the flagship of the Decepticons like this. It’s almost unthinkable.” She looked up at him with a small shrug of her shoulders.

“Understandable. I can’t say it wouldn’t be strange if I was welcomed aboard the Autobot flagship.” The very thought was laughable. It would no doubt be a trap designed to take him out once and for all.

As they walked the long dark halls of the *Nemesis* he began pointing out different rooms and their functions along the path. The running commentary seemed to relax the femme next to him as she turned to ask him questions about the ship itself. Her curiosity was laudable but he was certain not to give her too much information about the inner running of his flagship.

Making their way further into the ship they began to see more of his

warriors. Each time they came into view the reaction of his Decepticons was either laughable or downright embarrassing.

As they came to the medical bay area he stood next to one of the larger supply rooms, which had been emptied, and motioned the femmes inside. “I have given Knock Out this room for the sole purpose of detailing your group.” He said as he keyed open the door. Sure enough Knock Out was standing near a wall with a sprayer in hand, testing the different nozzles.

When he heard the door open the mech turned around and brightened, in a manner of speaking. “Ah, you’re here. Perfect. Who wants to go first? The quicker you decide the order and colors the quicker we can reverse this absolute tragedy.”

Megatron’s optics narrowed at the mech.

One of the femmes stepped forward with a laugh. “I’m right there with you. Got any blue?” She asked as she walked over to the containers of paint and the mixing station, looking thoughtful.

“Of course I have blue. I have every color imaginable.” Knock Out huffed as he set down his tool and joined the femme at the mixing station. “What shade were you thinking?”

As the two spoke about colors Megatron turned to Aria. “I’m afraid I can’t stay much longer. Starscream has been ordered to show you all due respect and lead you around the ship when your paint is finished. It is my hope you will join me afterward for a more in depth discussion about where your femmes would fit amongst my warriors.” He said with a polite bow, smiling at the femme as her wide blue optics looked up at him in surprise.

“I would be happy to talk with you further about our placement and what tasks we might be performing. As soon as the others are finished and the sparklings have settled down.” She agreed.

“Then I shall take my leave now. Good orn Aria, femmes, and the little ones.” Reaching out slowly he placed the tip of one digit on Hornet’s tiny helm and got a happy little chirp for his effort. He chuckled before sweeping out of the room and allowing the door to close behind him.

Pleased with how things were going so far he decided to check on the other project he’d given his warriors. ::Scrapper, report.::

::My Lord.:: The mech responded quickly. ::Construction is complete, following all extra safety protocols. The area is secure and ready for use.::

::Good work, Scrapper. You are all dismissed back to your regular duties.::

::Yes, my Lord. Thank you, my Lord.::

Continuing on to the bridge Megatron smirked to himself in triumph. So far everything was going to plan. Now all they had to do was wait and slowly pull their prey in closer.

Entering the bridge he was met with Reflector hurrying over. “My Lord! The scouting team have found a couple of shuttles on the far side of the temple. Both look brand new, like they just left the assembly line.”

“If there are shuttles then there are ships nearby. I want a full scan of the system, immediately.”

“Yes, my Lord.” As Reflector hurried back to his station Megatron turned to look out toward the temple. There was something strange going on, and he was going to get to the bottom of it.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Frequency- Blaster
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire

Hornet- Bumblebee
Figment- Mirage
Steadfast- Hound
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest- Slingshot

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Aria]

Once Frequency was finished getting painted she turned to look at them, hands on her hips. “How do I look?” She asked with a pleased smile.

The colors the femme had chosen were a light blue and a pure white. The colors were quite striking yet soft on her frame, especially since she had changed from the half and half design of before. Now her torso and helm were solidly blue with some small white detailing while her limbs were all white with blue detailing. If Aria looked closer she thought there might also be tiny lines of a soft green in between the white and the blue, giving the femme an almost faded look. It was quite fetching.

Knock Out did good work.

While it had been talked about earlier no one had been able to agree on whether or not to keep their original designs with adjusted colors or to go with entirely new designs along with the new colors. But if they went with the former there was a higher chance of their identities being discovered.

In the end they decided it would be best for each femme to make her own decision. Which suited Aria just fine. She had felt quite

uncomfortable with the idea of an entirely new color and design. Even now she was still struggling with the thought. But thankfully her new frame didn't have the same hard lines or shape as her previous one. Even if she had to change her colors the lines of her paint wouldn't match up with that of the mech known as Optimus Prime. So at the very least she would be able to keep the design, even if the colors had to go.

With Frequency finished Knock Out turned and eyed the lot of them. Aria thought the mech would be more upset having to do so many new paint jobs but as the mech listened to the Autobots complimenting Frequency's paint he seemed to preen.

Ah, yes. Knock Out was that kind of mech, wasn't he?

Lectura stepped forward and if Aria didn't know better she would have though the femme just rolled her optics. "Just so you are aware I have no particular design in mind. I would, however, prefer a moderate shade of green."

Knock Out looked the femme over, optics narrowed, before he let out a prim huff and turned towards the paints. "You just leave the design up to me. A 'moderate' shade of green. Hmph!"

Aria would have watched the mech work but after a moment Hornet began to squirm and fuss in her arms. "Hey, what's the matter little scout?" She asked, running her digits gently over the sparkling's helm. It was normally a calming gesture but it seemed that the little mech just didn't want to be soothed.

Hornet made a high pitched whine and pointed to the floor, clicking in frustration. "Down!"

"What do we say when we're asking for something?" She asked, tone stern as she looked down at the tiny scout to be.

Hornet crossed his arms, little wing stubs twitching with annoyance, as he let out a stubborn little chirp. "Please."

Aria nodded. Although his attitude could use a little work he had used his manners, and she wanted to reinforce that good behavior. "Alright, but you stay nearby, and you do not leave this room. Understand?"

Hornet gave her a little pout but nodded in a very exaggerated manner. It was absolutely adorable.

Once Aria set the little mech on the ground he darted off to pester Frequency, poking at her new paint and making curious whistling sounds. It looked like he was excited by the prospect of getting his own new paint.

At a sharp whistle Aria turned to see Skydancer wrangling the sparkling Aerialbots. It looked like they too had become bored just watching and wanted to play around. The problem was that they were attempting to climb the shelving which housed the paints. *"No- try later- ask Aria."* Aria wasn't able to pick up the full context from the trills and twitters but she was fairly certain she heard her designation.

The Aerialbots started to make a fuss and the large femme's expression fell slightly. She looked a little out of her depth.

Suddenly a low coo that rose into a sharp chirp caught the Aerialbots, attention. Aria too looked towards where the sound had originated and felt her optic ridges rise in surprise as Starscream knelt and held out his servos to the sparklings. *"Negative- bother- Caretaker."* Aria had almost forgotten the three Seekers were in the room, especially with how quiet Starscream had been before that moment. Starscream's optics shifted to look up at Skydancer before speaking again. *"Here- let us- play- the air?"* She translated what words she could and looked towards Skydancer in surprise. It almost sounded like Starscream was asking for permission for something.

The femme's optics bore into the kneeling Seeker's for a moment before she smiled gently and nodded. "Thank you, Starscream, Thundercracker, Skywarp. If you could take care of Brightarrow, Windsweeper, and Arbalest, I can watch Skyfall and Reverie."

Watching Starscream pick up Brightarrow, who had once been Silverbolt, and give the sparkling a genuine smile of joy was… a very conflicting sight. He was not a mech that she would ever consider trusting and yet she knew without a doubt that he would never harm any of the sparklings. It went against his very core coding. Seekers were protective of their young to begin with and it seemed that the Protocol was only reinforcing it.

As the mech lifted Brightarrow into the air and simulated flight she couldn't help smiling at the sound of joy and laughter.

"So, what do you think? I do good work, right? Of course I do." At Knock Out's voice she turned back to see Lectura's finished paint. The femme was a deep forest green with a lighter green on her lower arms

and legs.

“This will do… thank you.” Lectura didn’t look all that pleased but she didn’t complain either. It was just something they would all have to get used to.

Knock Out looked towards her and she felt a prickle of nervous energy spark through her. She wasn’t quite ready yet. “Skydancer?” She turned to the larger femme, ignoring a scoff from the Decepticon. “I’ll watch Skyfall and Reverie.”

The larger femme gave her a quiet look of concern but nodded and handed over the two sparklings without comment.

“So how about you then?” Knock out asked as he cocked a hip, brandishing the paint sprayer.

“A black base with red and blue sections. I… have the design file here.” Skydancer said almost shyly.

“Oh? Let’s see it then.”

As the two of them spoke about the shuttle’s new paint Aria turned her attention to the two Aerialbot sparklings. Neither of them seemed particularly upset with being handed over to her, or were trying to escape her grasp. So she took a seat and held the two of them close. “How about I tell you a story?” She asked with a small smile.

The two sparklings perked up and chirped an affirmative that had Aria chuckling.

“Alright then. Let me think… how about the Tale of Petrix Petrorabbit?” It was a tale used to encourage sparklings to listen to their creators and caretakers, for fear of suffering consequences. When the two sparklings chirped in agreement she began her story.

“Many megavorns ago there were four little petrorabbits. Flippy, Moppy, Sleek-ear, and Petrix. They lived with their creator in a cozy burrow-” as she wove her tale she noticed Figment and Steadfast had run over and were attempting to climb up her pede so they could listen as well. Lifting the two of them into her lap she let them get comfortable as she continued. “-Flippy, Moppy, and Sleek-ear, who were good little petrorabbits, went down to the fields to forage; but Petrix, who was very naughty, ran straight away to the dunes, where his creator had warned him not to go.”

When she finished the first story they begged for more so she pulled up another memory file from her time as an archivist and began The Tale of the Cube and the Crystal Cube. By the time the second story was completed and she was well into the third, Jammina Cyberduck, Skydancer was finished.

“But this isn’t what I asked for.” The femme said with some distress, causing everyone to turn toward the quiet scientist.

Knock Out let out a huff. “I improved on the design, that’s all.” It was clear he had no qualms ignoring the femme’s distress as she self-consciously crossed her arms over her chassis.

Aria’s optics trailed over the larger femme’s frame and frowned slightly. Just as she’d asked the base coat was black while sections were painted a bright red and medium blue. But between those sections all the detailing had been done in a familiar shade of purple. Aria glanced towards Starscream and his trinemates to see their reaction to the femme’s new paint and frowned at the smug look on the Decepticon’s face.

“What’s wrong with it? The purple looks like my-” Skywarp was interrupted by a sharp elbow from Thundercracker, who gave his leader an implacable stare.

There must have been a short conversation over their personal comms, or perhaps their bond, as Starscream stepped forward and looked imperiously down at Knock Out. “You were assigned this task by Lord Megatron, and he was adamant that you respect the wishes of the femmes.”

The red mech let out a click of agitation. “Fine. But I was only trying to improve on the design. Besides, I don’t see you objecting to the matching red.” He said with a superior smirk.

Aria looked between Skydancer and Starscream before looking back at Thundercracker and Skywarp. Oh… oh Primus. Now that she was looking for it she realized that Knock Out had matched Skydancer’s shades to that of the Command Trine. Red for Starscream, blue for Thundercracker, and purple for Skywarp.

Starscream let out a defensive hiss that sent a shiver down her spinal struts, and set the flight framed sparklings in her lap to twittering in mild distress. “Whether I object or not has no bearing on your orders.” He snapped, pointing one claw tipped servo at the mech’s chest. “If *Dancer of the Skies* doesn’t want certain paint then you will listen to

her desires."

Before Knock Out could say something in response Skydancer stepped partially between them. "It's alright Starscream. I… am not opposed to the purple now that I know it was not done with malice." Her optics fell on the Seeker before darting away again shyly. "Thank you for defending my right to choose."

Starscream's wings twitched upward in a manner that Aria vaguely remembered being an indication of surprise before they shifted into what she thought might be a pleased or smug position. "Of course. But if you change your mind Knock Out will be fixing your paint." He glared at the Velocitronian before turning back to his trine and accepting Brightarrow back from Thundercracker.

With the confrontation ended Skydancer hurried over to her with an apologetic smile. "I'll take them off your servos, Pr- Aria." Holding out her large servos towards her Aria realized that she wanted the sparklings. It looked like it was finally her turn for paint.

With as calm a look as she could muster she carefully handed over the four sparklings and made her way over to Knock Out's little painting corner.

"Well, well, well. The femme of the joor. Painting you will certainly be interesting." The mech said as he circled her frame with a light hum.

"How so?" She asked, doing her best not to cross her arms over her chassis and hide from his intent red optics.

"I've painted Warframes and Civilians but never somebot that was a mix of the two." He stopped, looking up at her with servos on hips. "So, what colors am I working with?"

Aria cleared her vocoder. "I have a rough design drawn up," her optics narrowed, "with pre-determined shades if you don't mind."

The mech rolled his optics and made a 'give me' motion with his digits. Aria sent over the files and waited as the mech reviewed them.

"Doable, easily, but a bit bland don't you think?"

Aria gave him a stern look that had cowed far larger and more stubborn mechs.

“Alright, fine. Give me a moment to mix the colors.”

It didn’t take him long before she was standing beneath the sprayer as he made a black base coat, being careful not to accidentally color over her insignia. Once the black was dry he switched to a deep shade of pink. It was not close to the bright glow of energon, which was only worn by warriors of certain renown or those who wanted to make a statement, but closer to a red. Once the color had set the mech switched to the medium purple, which leaned more towards a blue hue. This way she could feel as if she had her old paint without giving anything away… at least she hoped.

When he was finished the mech stepped back and gave her a quick once over with his optics. “Not bad, you certainly have the lines for this kind of design.” The mech said with an approving nod. “It looks a bit familiar though…”

Aria looked at him in surprise, her spark pulsing faster in her chest. “I imagine that most designs would be familiar to you, I’ve heard you were a renowned cosmetician and cosmetic surgeon?”

The mech’s optics brightened and he smiled. “I was, still am in most respectable circles.” He boasted, pulling out another sprayer. “Just the final over-coat and you’re finished.”

Letting out a small sigh of relief she stood under the sprayer one last time before she was finally released back to her comrades.

“Oh wow! That looks wicked Pr- Boss!” Frequency said as she stepped back into view of the others.

“I must concur. It is very fetching.” Lectura said with a polite nod.

Skydancer just smiled brightly.

“I do good work, if there was any doubt.” Knock Out said smugly as he came around the screens used to keep the paint contained to one area. “So, how am I doing this? I assume their caretakers have chosen their colors?” He nodded towards the sparklings running around playing.

“Yeah, we picked their colors.” Frequency said as she scooped up one of the sparklings and snuggled him before striding over to Knock Out’s corner. “We can start with Steadfast. Just a nice madder red for this little mech.”

“If you insist.” Knock Out said as he moved out of the way and let the femme bring the sparkling back behind the screens.

Thankfully Steadfast, who used to be Hound, was a very calm and quiet sparkling. Not prone to fits or fussing. He was more curious about the sprayer and the paint than anything. So his time under the sprayer was short.

Seeing Steadfast sporting his new red made the other sparklings curious and excited about getting their own paint. They crowded around him and poked at the shiny color with awe.

When Frequency snagged Figment the mech went eagerly. Although he fussed a little when it came time for the sprayer he didn’t act out and was finished almost as quickly. Now sporting a primarily gray with steel blue color scheme.

Next went Brightarrow, who only fussed when he was separated from his brothers and couldn’t see them. But with Starscream standing there the sparkling calmed enough to get his primary navy blue, white, and purple design. Skyfall went next and received a similar design but with navy blue, black, and white detailing. Then Reverie, Windsweeper, and Arbalest with navy blue, white, and black detailing. It was similar enough to how they’d preferred their colors before the change just slightly modified as to be unrecognizable.

Aria did note the unreadable look between Starscream, Thundercracker, and Skywarp as the three of them were the ones taking turns to stand with the Aerialbots as they were painted, leaving Skydancer and whoever wasn’t in the painting area to watch the remainder.

Five bots being colored similarly was a trend only permanent teams or Gestalts went for. To see it on sparklings was a bit of an oddity. She was certain that there would be questions eventually. She only hoped she and the others could come up with a good excuse. Then again Seekers, and really anyone from Vos, thought of bonds as sacred. So they very well may not ask at all out of respect.

Out of all the sparklings the one she least expected to have trouble with was Hornet. So it was quite a surprise when he was the one who threw a shrieking tantrum when his demand for a yellow primary coat was at first denied.

Aria floundered for a moment as Knock Out winced and took a couple of large steps back, giving her a look that screamed ‘make it stop.’ So

she scooped up the little scout and rumbled her engine in a manner that had always soothed her when she was a sparkling. “Do you think we could go with a more orange yellow primary color?” She asked the mech once Hornet had calmed some, letting out angry little hiccups.

“Anything if you make sure he doesn’t do that again!” The mech said as he turned back to the paints to mix a new shade.

As soon as Knock Out was testing the dark mustard yellow on a corner of scrap metal Hornet chirped in happy excitement, pointing at it. “Color! Mine!”

Aria let out a sigh but nodded. “Yes, that is your new color.” She didn’t want to reinforce the bad behavior but there wasn’t really anything she could do to scold him about it now that he’d already gotten his way. She would have to be more vigilant and stop the tantrum before it began next time.

Once the base coat of dark mustard yellow was finished Knock Out looked to her with a raised optic ridge. “That yellow is a bit… much on its own.” He said with a grimace.

Aria chuckled. “Luckily I’ve already picked a secondary. Can you make a dark brown that wouldn’t look out of place with the yellow?”

“Can I?” He rolled his optics. “I can make any color you can think of… almost any color.” He admitted with a sigh. “Paint supplies aren’t exactly a top priority.” Mixing the brown he sprayed it on the scrap metal before shaking his helm and adding a little bit of green. Spraying it again he seemed pleased with the hue and turned back to Hornet.

“Anything specific?” He seemed to have learned his lesson after Starscream had gone after him for not following their wishes.

Aria hid a small smile. “Stripes, his old paint had stripes.” She gave him a polite incline of the helm. “In this manner I’ll bow to your expertise and let you decide how best to apply them.”

The mech smirked and brandished the small detailer. “Prepare to be impressed.”

When he was finished Hornet was looking over his new paint and chirping happily, letting out pleased little whistles. His helm was now brown, with the section framing his face remaining dark yellow. His pauldrons were also brown with diagonal stripes in a single chevron

pattern going down his arms. The top of his chest was brown with the same single chevron pattern down his abdominal plating. His hips remained yellow while his knee guards became brown. The upper part of his leg armor was yellow, as were his pedes, while a reverses chevron rose to meet the knee guards.

All in all it was a very striking, and very different, design to what he'd had as Bumblebee.

Picking up Hornet once his last coat was finished she smiled gratefully at Knock Out. "I know it was only orders, but still- thank you." She said sincerely.

The sparklings lack of color had been a thrumming note anxiety in the back of all their minds. Now at least some of them were looking far more healthy and a lot less like sparkless frames.

Knock Out looked taken aback as he set down the sprayer but his smug grin returned quickly. "You are very welcome. Now just be sure not to ruin those new paint jobs doing anything reckless."

Aria frowned slightly. "What would you consider reckless?"

The mech paused. "Just be careful, Autobot. Or next time I'll be picking your colors." He said, voice dripping with disdain as he named her faction.

Right. She had almost forgotten who they were dealing with here. She would not be making that mistake once she and the others were actually working amongst the Decepticons.

"I'll take your warning to spark." She said seriously before leaving the mech to clean his tools.

"Oh hey, look at you!" Frequency practically cooed as she spotted Hornet's new look. "Our little scout-bug."

Starscream looked over from where he was keeping his servos under a hovering Arbalest. "Scout-bug?" He asked, looking a klik away from snorting at the nickname.

Aria gave Frequency a stern look as the other femme winced. She turned to Starscream and gave him a polite smile. "It's a nickname based on his creator's specialty."

The mech gently lifted Arbalest out of the air, much to the little

mech's confusion, before giving Aria a calculated look. "His creator? And who would that be? Another Autobot, I assume."

"That information is none of your business, or concern." Lectura said with a haughty sniff, playing up her 'elite scientist' persona.

Starscream gave the other femme a disgruntled look but bit back his reply when Skydancer placed a hand on his shoulder, almost subconsciously, and took Arbalest gently from him.

"It doesn't matter, he's gone. All of the sparklings are orphans. Were orphans." Aria corrected herself as she smiled gently down at Hornet. Already she could feel the creator-creation bond growing between the two of them. Hornet had chosen her from the start and didn't seem very inclined to leave her side. It made her feel both joyful and a little regretful.

As Optimus he'd taken Bumblebee under his guidance and had mentored the young scout as best he could between mission briefings and battlefields. But he'd never taken the extra step to formalize anything, to let the bot he would be proud to call creation form a bond with him. The risk was just too high. If either of them died it would severely impact the other, though not as much as a conjunx bond would if broken. Neither she nor Bumblebee had anyone close enough to have been considered spouse material, let alone acted upon such feelings.

Starscream's optics bore into her for a long moment before he backed off. "Well. If you're all finished we have places to be." He turned to Lectura. "Thundercracker will show you to the science division where you can make the sparkling grade energon." He motioned to his trinemate, who gave a short wave at the attention. "If there's no objections we can-"

Frequency stepped forward, arms over her chassis and an amused smile on her face. "Hold up there, I have business with a specific mech. Think you could point me in Soundwave's direction?"

Starscream spluttered for a moment before giving her a sharp look. "If you come along with your leader when she is presented to Megatron I can bring you to him." It was clear he was suspicious of them. Or perhaps the distrust between Starscream and Soundwave that they heard about through overhearing Decepticon gossip wasn't exaggerated.

Fortunately Frequency was excellent at affecting a perfectly relaxed

demeanor and just gave the mech a lazy smile in return. “Thanks!”

The mech huffed, wings twitching with agitation. “With no further interruptions?” When no one said anything else he nodded curtly and went to the door. “Follow along, and don’t wander off.” Behind them Thundercracker and Skywarp took rearguard near Skydancer.

At first she thought they were being boxed in so they couldn't escape but as Skydancer flushed slightly and looked between the three other fliers Aria realized that wasn’t what was happening at all. Starscream, and by extension his trine, were falling back on their core programming. They were guarding the sparklings and their caretakers. It was completely instinctual and subconscious. It was also, for a trine of the Winglord, seen as a potential courting gesture to another flier.

Aria buried her face against Hornet and tried to stifle her laughter. This orn was just getting stranger and stranger. So focused on not laughing aloud and embarrassing the poor shuttle femme Aria didn’t notice as the matrix lit up with approval and warmth before going dormant once more.

Chapter End Notes

> I've been really sick for three weeks now. Almost had to go to the hospital with a fever of 39c/102f but I'm well on the mend by now. But this means my editing is sorely lacking. If you guys see any spelling mistakes please let me know? Thank you.
>
> EDIT: Took out all references to Drift from the Wreckers cause I didn't know if he was supposed to be Deadlock or not. And I have plans for Deadlock.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Surprise! We're getting to see some other Decepticon POVs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Shockwave]

Alone in his lab, where he had been undisturbed for some time, the purple mech waited for the test results of his latest experiment. He did not feel anticipation, nor did he feel impatience. Rather he took the time while waiting to be as productive with his time as possible. It was only logical, after all.

Carrying a couple of beakers to the sink to be washed the mech faltered in his steps as an invasive signal was suddenly broadcast on every frequency. No matter what channel he attempted, or how he tried to shut the signal down, nothing worked.

Whatever it was he could tell it had some sort of core programming and could feel the moment it wormed its way past his firewalls and started to attack his systems.

Plugging himself into one of his isolated terminals he scoured the lines of code to see what the program was attempting.

What he found had the cyclops staring at the screen for a long time, uncomprehending. What the program was attempting to do, and succeeding at, was impossible. Or at least he had thought it impossible.

As the program began to attack and re-write the coding that had been forced upon him ages ago by the Autobots, rendering him emotionless, he stood there as an odd sensation suffused his frame.

It was distress.

Shockwave, for the first time in countless millennia, was feeling an emotion.

…this was going to take a considerable amount of time to process.

[Starscream]

Escorting the femmes and nestlings down the halls of the Nemesis he kept his helm high and wings set in a confident position. Being allowed to hold the nestlings, to play with them and ease their distress, had left him feeling quite chipper. Knock Out stepping over the line had been a momentary hiccup but as he glanced back at the shuttle femme he could admit that the mech did good work. Seeing their combined colors along the femme's sturdy frame and wings had all three of them feeling more than a little pleased, appreciative, and proud.

As far as the grounders were concerned it was nothing more than a new paint job. But for those who hailed from Vos the statement was quite blatant. Normally, as Winglord, Starscream would have demanded such a transgression be rectified. He had not given his express permission and neither of his trinemates had been approached to facilitate such a request. It was highly inappropriate all things considered. However he had to admit that he quite liked the idea of the femme knowingly wearing his trine's colors.

If they were going to attempt to court the shuttle anyway then why not make a blatant claim? At least this way anyone who tried to approach the femme would be warned away from trying anything, or else suffer the wrath of the Winglord's trine.

As plans went this one had a high percentage of success.

"Hey Starscream, you going to fill us in on where we're heading any time soon? It's feeling a bit tense back here." The Carrier femme said casually, voice sounding relaxed and at ease.

Turning his head he looked over the tense frames of the Autobot femmes and realized that the Carrier was right. He felt a flash of concern from Thundercracker, nervousness from Skywarp, and had to grit his dentae to not scowl.

"It's just up ahead." He said with a small huff.

"…yeah, but what's up ahead?" The Carrier femme muttered with a roll of her optics.

Starscream just ignored her and pushed onward. He had been forbidden from saying anything and while he normally would have scoffed at Megatron ordering him to do something so unnecessary he actually agreed with the mech for once.

Passing by the guards stationed outside the room he could feel the tenseness and worry from his trinemates as the femmes almost didn't follow him inside. Turning around when he was far enough in the room that they could all come inside he grinned smugly as he watched their expressions change from concern to surprise.

Behind him, created by the Constructicons at the behest of their Lord, was a penned in play area. Inside there was a gym set and a few hastily thrown together toys that the nestlings could play with. "In case you are concerned about its construction it has followed all the proper safety protocols as last updated in the final record of the Public Safety Building Guide, version 336.54.9908." It had been a surprise to learn that Scrapper still carried the building codes after all this time.

The nestlings began to chatter amongst themselves, fidgeting and trying to get down so they could go and explore. Except for the flight of nestlings, who had been much better behaved since he and his trine had stepped in to help.

Brightarrow looked to his caretaker then to Starscream before chirping. "Down please? Go play please?"

He wasn't certain if the question was being asked of himself or the flight's caretaker but he smiled and nodded his permission all the same.

He was the Winglord, and if he had his way their rightful caretaker, it was instinctual that the nestlings would look to him for permission.

Skydancer's optics brightened and she smiled as she stepped forward and placed the nestlings inside the walled play area. The floor and walls were all padded on the inside, to help keep the nestlings safe from harm, and the play structures were well grounded.

After Skydancer it was the leader, Aria, who came forward and set her little menace in the pen. "Be nice, and no climbing the walls." She said sternly. The little yellow and brown mech just chirped cheerily back before practically throwing himself at the gym, little wing-stubs twitching with excitement.

Once Aria had set her own nestling down the other two finally followed suit. As they watched the nestlings explore and begin to play their tense frames began to relax.

"Starscream, who else will be watching the sparklings while we're off in meetings or working?" Aria asked him, optic ridge furrowed and

field pulled in tight.

“Skywarp will remain here to help with the nes- sparklings. As well as Reflector.” Nodding past the femme’s shoulder at the mech who had silently come inside a moment ago he smirked when she turned in surprise.

“I see.” He wanted to snort in amusement as the leader of the femmes narrowed her optics for a moment before fully turning toward the other mech. “Apologies, I had thought your designation was Spyglass?”

Reflector straightened a little in surprise, not that Starscream could blame him. It was strange that an Autobot would know to make that kind of distinction.

“This unit is sometimes called Spyglass to differentiate it from the other units, but we are Reflector.” The mech said with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

Understanding seemed to dawn on the femme and she nodded. “Of course, forgive me if I overstepped. I will be sure to refer to you by your preferred designation.” A polite smile crossed her face and Reflector-Spyglass nodded.

“It is appreciated.” Turning to Starscream he crossed his arm over his chassis. “This unit is here to serve our duty.” Although he spoke simply there was an edge to his field that spoke of excitement and yearning.

Starscream understood. It had been a long time since there had been nestlings amongst them to dote on and protect. The urge to guard and provide was a near constant itch under the plating. He nodded and motioned towards the play area.

“Now that you know they’ll be safe, shall we?” He motioned imperiously towards the door.

The femmes looked at one another in apprehension before their optics all snapped to their leader. Clearly she had said something that eased their separation anxiety as they all filed out of the room with him, Thundercracker taking up the rear.

There was work to be done. They could dote on the nestlings later.

[Soundwave]

As he worked on the internal issue his Lord had tasked him with the quiet mech paused when an alert came over his comms. Reading the missive he stood there for a long moment as he contemplated what one of the femmes could want with him. He wasn't often sought out, even by those of his own faction, besides Lord Megatron and others who were in the Decepticon inner circle.

Agreeing to the meeting he finished another dossier and filed it away for perusal later. He sensed the SIC before he arrived and had a moment of mild confusion before he turned to see two frames darken his doorway.

"Soundwave, this is Frequency. She had some business with you." Starscream said without preamble, waving his servo in the air as it the matter had nothing to do with him.

"Statement: Introduction satisfactory. Question: What business does Autobot Frequency have with Soundwave?" Turning to the femme he ignored when Starscream rolled his optics and left the room. He knew that his old friend felt some guilt and discomfort over the way he spoke when there were others around.

"Hiya mech." Came a melodic voice from the femme. Now that he was paying more attention to the femme he realized she was a Carrier, like himself. His interest was piqued. There weren't a lot of their frametype around anymore. "So this is a bit of a… delicate issue, right? I need to know that whatever I say here isn't going to be leaked to everyone." Before he could raise an objection the femme raised her servos. "Hold on, lemme finish, I know you can't keep it from Meg-Lord Megatron. I just don't want it going rounds in the gossip pool. It involves one of the sparklings and we take their safety seriously."

Deadly seriously, if her optics were anything to go by.

"Statement: Soundwave understands and will comply. Proceed with your query." He agreed to the request easily. Although many tended to forget the symbiotic relationship between a Carrior and their Symbiotes was very much akin to a Caretaker-Creation bond. If anybot would agree to protect sparklings it was a Carrier, with a close second being a Seeker. Not to mention the fact that Warframes were just protective over young frames in general.

"Thank you." The femme was quiet for a moment, clearly thinking about how to phrase her questions.

As she stood there he tried to get a read on her emotions and

thoughts, only to find himself rebuffed by a scrambled and unintelligible frequency.

“One of the sparklings, his name is Siren, is showing signs of being an empath. Our psychologist did some tests and found that he could read the thoughts of those around him but… he’s too young to understand what’s going on. He has a… close friend who is keeping him calm and grounded but it’s obvious that he’s afraid of the voices he’s hearing in his helm.” The femme let out a sigh and Soundwave felt a ripple of sympathy.

He remembered those days. The feeling of going insane, the lack of understanding, the isolation…

“I was hoping you could help us with some coping mechanisms. Maybe some kind of tricks or training? We figured if anyone would understand it’s you, Wave-mech.” As the femme gave him a wide smile, optics filled with hope, Soundwave felt his spark begin to spin faster in his chassis.

Wave-mech. Only one bot in existence had both the ability to block his empathy and also called him by that ridiculous nickname.

“Statement: There are old files with training instructions and coping mechanisms. Soundwave will compile them and send them to the Autobot leader. Question: Will that be sufficient?”

The femme’s smile brightened considerably. “Yeah! That’s perfect, thanks Wave-mech! Now I’ve got to go head to my shift, we’ll talk later yeah?” The femme said as she walked backwards towards the door, where Starscream was outside waiting.

“Affirmative.” He said just as she was ducking outside and prodding the irate Winglord into showing her around.

The silence of his personal comms center left Soundwave with two burning question; how in Primus’ name had Blaster been reformatted into a femme? And… what did he do with this knowledge?

[Deadlock]

Sitting on a crate and looking over the rifle in his hands the black and red mech let his mind drift. Nearby he could hear a couple of slackers talking as they rummaged through the other crates to find whatever it was Starscream had ordered them to find.

“I’m telling you, smoking hot. They look like civies but they move like they’ve been kicking aft for millennia. I only got a quick look before his Screechiness warned us off. Seriously, the way that mech’s been acting lately has been really weird.” The first voice said with a scoff.

“I heard that the shuttle’s new paint job has the same shade of red as Starscream. Usually he’d be tearing into whoever had the ball bearings to do it.” The second voice supplied with an amused snort. “Do you know what the first thing the Autobot medic did was? I overheard Barricade talking about it to someone.”

“No, what happened?”

“The medic walked right up to our Lord and demanded to know who was injured, while cussing. Then fixed Barricade's arm while telling him off.”

“No slagging way, you’re full of it.”

“No, I’m serious! The name was something like… Ricket? Racket?”

Deadlock stiffened, his attention wholly fixed on the conversation now. There was no way. No way in the Pit that he’d heard right.

Setting down the rifle he stood and walked around the stack of crates to stare down the two mechs, who startled at his sudden appearance.

“The name wouldn’t happened to have been Ratchet, would it?”

Chapter End Notes

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Frequency- Blaster
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire

Hornet- Bumblebee
Figment- Mirage
Steadfast- Hound
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

AN: This is still a 'Crack Treated Seriously' story. So while some things are more serious and have serious implications, I'm focusing more on the matchmaking and the hilarious misunderstandings.

AN 2: If you want news on Updates feel free to come follow me over on Tumblr. Shelaar

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Megatron]

Attempting to work in his office the leader of the Decepticon army quickly found himself too distracted to focus. His leg bounced up and down with impatience as he glanced at the time. While he knew it would take a while for the femmes and sparklings to be finished their paint this knowledge did not ease his agitation. With a small growl Megatron rose from his desk and wandered over to the shelf where he kept his collection of literature dataslates. Running his digit along the edge of his oldest acquisition he recalled the words that had spoken to him so strongly back when he was a mere gladiator.

“No matter how the upper echelons try to keep us shackled we, the people of Cybertron, are the majority. Mech or femme, born to the pits of Kaon or the heights of Vos, we all bleed energon. Together we are stronger than they claim. We can take hold of our own destinies. We can free ourselves from the chains of oppression. We, all of us, can transform our own futures. We are more than meets the optic, and we are here to say- no more!” They were the words of a seasoned scholar, spoken on a nameless street corner in Kaon. Yet they had been seared into Megatron’s processor like a brand.

There was a chime and with a snarl he answered the comm. ::What is it?::

::Lord Megatron, the nestlings are safely in the Playpen and under guard. The femmes are being taken to their designated work stations now. One of them requested a meeting with Soundwave, the Carrier named Frequency.:: It was Starscream, sounding surprisingly calm and with less sarcasm than usual.

::Oh? Is there any particular reason she gave for wanting to speak with him?:: It was curious. Most Autobots, and even the majority of his Decepticons, were nervous around Soundwave.

Starscream was quiet for a moment before responding. Not long enough to be suspicious, but enough that he was clearly thinking over his response. ::I assume it is because they are both Carriers and they have a shared culture, or it has to do with one of the nestlings. The femmes are very focused and motivated to do things based on their care.::

That was the second time Starscream had used the Vosnian term for sparklings in his hearing. It made him wonder at the change. What were the parameters of this so called 'Protocol' Aria mentioned? And how would it effect his warriors going forward.

::Then I see no reason to bar this femme from speaking with him.:: Whatever information Soundwave could glean from this femme would surely work in his favor.

::I'll take them to the communications hub first then.:: Starscream's voice turned smug. ::Looks like you'll have to wait for your little parley with the Autobot leader a little longer.::

Megatron scowled but didn't rise to the bait. ::You are dismissed.:: Cutting off the communication he leaned against his desk, arms crossed over his chest, and continued to ponder the enigma that was Aria. A competent leader like that didn't just spring up from the ether, and it was obvious that she was competent. Her commands were obeyed without question when given and he had seen more than once the way the other femmes all immediately looked to her in a given situation. On top of that her fighting skill had both surprised and impressed him. It was rare that anyone got beneath his guard to lay such a heavy blow. The immediate follow up sweep that forced him onto his back was also perfectly executed. There was no hesitation in her optics, only sheer self-assurance and necessity. In fact- her gaze had lacked the usual contempt or hatred he had long since grown accustomed to.

'Who are you?' He wondered. 'Where did you come from?' And more importantly, 'how do I bring you to my side?'

It didn't take that long for Starscream to bring the Autobot leader to his work office, even though it felt like an eternity. The door opened behind him as he was re-organizing his shelf and he turned to

welcome the femme into his personal space. The moment his optics fell upon her frame he froze. Deep pink and bluish purple over an under-coat of matte black. It made the colors noticeable without being distracting. Although the way her armor hugged her accented curves was certainly making him lose focus.

Starscream let out a small scoff of annoyance and it snapped him out of his intense examination of the femme. He spared a withering glance at his second before addressing his guest. “Aria, I see our resident ‘artist’ has done his job well, those colors suit you. He didn’t cause any trouble, I hope?”

The smug look on Starscream’s face could be ignored. For now. He was far more interested in the way Aria shifted in place, almost bashfully.

“Knock Out didn’t cause me any trouble, he was very accommodating. Especially for the sparklings.” She gave Starscream a slight side eye before she continued. “He did cause a little stir with Skydancer’s colors, but Starscream was quick to defend her. All in all it was an enjoyable enough experience, although I hope you’ll forgive me if I don’t want to repeat it for a while.” She let out a small chuckle, her optics brightening subtly.

Megatron’s optics narrowed but it seemed that the femme wasn’t trying to lie. That or she was the best actor he had ever seen in his life. “As long as you’re satisfied.” Walking around to the other side of his desk he pulled out the chair he’d set across from his own earlier. “Please, have a seat. I’d like to discuss our mutual aid in finer detail.”

The femme seemed startled for a moment, optics locking with his own as if she were carefully weighing all her options. Then a smile, faint but there, at the corner of her lips. “Thank you for showing me around, Starscream.” She said pleasantly before coming to stand on the other side of the chair from him. “I’m not sure what other details there are to discuss about our situation, but it can’t hurt.” Looking at his servo on the back of the chair for a moment she looked mildly perturbed before taking a seat.

Megatron wondered if no one had ever treated the femme properly before, and what that said about the mechs in her life when a Warlord was showing more etiquette. After pushing in her chair he turned to raise a brow ridge at Starscream. His flighty second in command rolled his optics and sketched an overly formal bow before leaving the room, head held high and proud.

Going around the large desk he took his customary seat. He knew he would have to take control of the conversation if he wanted to steer it in the right direction. “First, I wanted to ask how the sparklings are faring. The Constructicons were quite motivated to finish the play area before your arrival.” Lacing his digits together he kept his servos on his desk in a style that mimicked the etiquette of Iacon, a reverse of what she had done during their negotiations in the Temple.

Aria’s optics fell to his servos, with all the pock marks and scoring from his hard life as a warrior. If she was startled by his mannerisms she certainly didn’t show it. “Hornet and the others were very excited to have somewhere to play, and I know my femmes are relieved the sparklings will be somewhere safe during our work shifts.” The soft and genuine smile that crossed her features was like watching a newborn star light up the void of cold space.

His spark stuttered in his chest and he had to fight to keep his reaction off his face. “Excellent. However, before any doubts may creep in, I want to reassure you that this was something done on my orders- with no expectation of anything in return. Sparklings are our future. Any warframe that would not protect a sparkling is not worthy of their function.” He said firmly.

Aria’s helm titled slightly, as if seeing him from a new angle would help whatever was going through her processor at the moment. “I share that sentiment, although not as far as to think those bots don’t deserve to live.” She shook her helm slightly. “Some bots are just not meant to be creators.”

Megatron smiled. “Certainly, although you seem to have taken to being a creator quite well.” There was a small distinction, between a creator and a caretaker. It was obvious to anyone with optics that Aria had taken to the role of both with aplomb. “Would it be impudent of me to ask what happened to their original creators?”

The femme stiffened, her optics flashing with grief and surprisingly potent anger. “Dead. Some of them were Autobots who died in battle, some were neutrals who fell during the rioting or the sacking of cities.” She let out a heavy vent of frustration. “Others died of treatable disease, hunger, or just plain accidents.” Raising her optics to his she held him captive with a single weighty look. “Part of the blame for their deaths can be laid at your pedes.” She accused, though it lacked the hate and vitriol he was used to hearing. “And a large part can be laid at the pedes of the Autobots. At my pedes.” Looking down at her servo she slowly closed it into a fist before opening it again.

Megatron frowned thoughtfully. Whatever he had expected to hear, it was not the femme falling into a self-recriminating fugue. Reaching across the desk he brushed his servo against hers, just enough to catch her attention. Once her optics locked on his he gave her a solemn look, gritting his dentae to keep from bringing up his grievances with the Autobots. “For the time being, for the sake of our current alliance and the predicament you’ve found yourselves in, we should leave such things behind us.”

The femme startled slightly at the touch but didn’t pull away. A deeply thoughtful look crossed her face before she straightened, nodding at him curtly. “My apologies, Megatron, you’re right. I will not bring it up again. So, perhaps, we should also leave our pasts behind us as well?”

Ah, well played. Now he couldn’t pry into the lives of the femmes for more information without stepping over that boundary line. But there was a very simple work around. “If we want this temporary truce to last then showing some interest in each other will go a long way. Speaking of hobbies and things outside of war will foster camaraderie and a sense of familiarity. Is that not something you Autobots claim to strive for?”

Aria’s lips twitched slightly. “Have you never heard the saying ‘familiarity breeds contempt?’” She asked almost playfully before sobering. “Although in this case I can see the merits of it. We are existing in a tenuous state of mutual cooperation.” The ‘for now’ was not spoken aloud but he could hear it in her voice. Yet it didn’t sound contemptuous or biting, more contemplative with a hint of hopefulness.

“Why don’t we start here?” He motioned between the two of them, giving her one of his more charming smiles. “Do you happen to have an interest in literature?”

Optic ridges rising in surprise the femme let out a small chuckle. “I do. I am very fond of historical texts and historical fiction, among other things.”

Megatron blinked, blindsided by her response. Although he should have suspected, since the femme used to be an archivist. “I’ve enjoyed my fair share of historical texts as well. What authors do you enjoy?”

As the femme settled into the chair, her frame slowly relaxing as they began an in depth discussion about ancient writing, Megatron felt the

hunger from their first meeting rear its helm. A leader and a scholar, a caretaker and a warrior. Out of all the femmes he'd met or even spoken to, none had the allure that Aria exuded without trying. She was authentic in a way he was unused to and although he could tell she was still hiding things he didn't begrudge her.

In the moment between one reply and the next a long dead sequence of coding snapped back to life, aided by the healing properties of the Protocol. The desire to protect and provide began to cycle in the back of his helm, unnoticed by the mech himself.

Something deep in his spark flickered as Megatron swore he would prove himself a worthy suitor for the femme leader sitting across from him like an equal.

[Aria]

Sitting in Megatron's office and talking about philosophy was not what she thought she'd be doing when she and her comrades walked up the ramp of the Nemesis that orn. They'd talked it over and many of her Autobots thought it might be a trap, warning her to be wary. Now here she was discussing literature and other innocent topics with the mech she'd been fighting against for millennia. Not that he knew that little fact.

From the beginning Megatron had been nothing but accommodating and polite. It would have reminded her of a statesman if it weren't for the weapon upgrades and the extensive scarring on his armor. Scarring that she knew from past cultural studies he was proud of. To a Kaonite Warframe it was proof that he had tenacity and the will to survive anything thrown at him. For someone from Iacon it would be considered degrading and humiliating, as if being a hardworking bot was some sort of failing. But Aria had never prescribed to that way of thinking. She'd had too many friends in the working class to think of it as something embarrassing.

"…which makes me believe that the large sculpted slates they have at the Central Museum are actually mistranslated copies." The mech said with a small scowl. "Although I suppose you won't take me at my word about-"

"I do." She said, cutting him off. The mech had a bad habit of self-sabotaging himself in his speech patterns, which she knew was a learned habit. "I've also always thought that the translation was subtly off in a way that is very biased." It had been one of Orion's common

complaints to Alpha Trion, his mentor at the Iacon Central Archives. “Iaconian is a relatively young language and has dropped a lot of the old metaphorical and illustrative glyphs for ‘efficiency.’ Because of that I feel like we’ve… lost something of our culture.” She shook her head sadly. So much had been lost. From corruption, greed, and the ongoing war. She’d tried to preserve as much as she could with the Matrix but it wasn’t as simple as downloading a file and storing it in the archives.

When the mech across from her didn’t say anything she looked up and met his optics squarely. This was the first time she’d ever seen that expression on the warframe’s face. He looked… stunned. Speechless. It would be comical if it wasn’t for the intense and focused attention he was paying her.

“You are not what I expected.” He rumbled finally, sitting back and watching her as he drummed his digits on the desk in an absentminded pattern. “The Autobots I have met before are arrogant, sure in their ways, and would never deign to admit fault. In themselves or their faction.”

Aria grimaced but didn’t shy away from the mech’s words. “I have met such bots myself. But you must also admit that you have many of those same mentalities in your own Decepticons.” Her expression firmed into something more solemn. “The Autobots of before are gone. If you wanted change then congratulations- you have achieved it. All that’s left now are civilians fighting for their lives when they want nothing more than to go back to their original functions.” Her shoulders came back and she stared the mech down. “A doctor, a psychologist, a courier, musicians, scientists, and inventors. I myself was an Archivist before…” Before becoming Prime. Before the upgrades that would allow Optimus to stand toe to toe with their foe. Before the reformat into a femme.

The mech’s servo curled into a fist, his short talons digging into the desk and causing long scratches. The sound wasn’t pleasant either and had her wincing slightly.

“You have given me much to think about, Aria. But I suggest we shelve this conversation for the time being.” Although he said ‘suggest’ she could feel the command in his tone. Talking about this topic any further would just enrage the warlord. Not very productive if she wanted to sow peace.

“I understand, we’ve gone off topic in any case.” Looking at the

chrono on the wall she frowned. “I should head to my work shift.” She didn’t want the Decepticons to think she was unwilling to work, or worse, that she thought she was too good to work with them.

Megatron glowered at the chrono on the wall but nodded. “I will show you to the supply hold so you may work with the Quartermaster.”

Aria nodded her helm in acceptance and gratitude. She didn’t relish the idea of wandering around the Nemesis without a guide. Off the top of her helm she could name a dozen scenarios that could end poorly. “My thanks, Megatron.”

The mech stood and came around to her chair before she had a chance to get up. With a half bow he offered his servo to her, an amused smirk playing at the edges of his lips.

Hesitating for a moment she set her servo in his and allowed him to help her up. Briefly she wondered if any of the Autobot delegations had brought femmes with them, and whether or not Megatron had been just as courteous to them. The mech’s interest in her seemed… pointed. But not in a way that made Aria think he’d figured out her secret. It also wasn’t as unnerving as she thought it should be. If anything she felt a little flattered.

“The lift is just down the hall.” His servo closed over hers for a moment before he released her. “It shouldn’t take long, and if the quartermaster makes a fuss about you being late I will deal with it.” He walked out the door and waited for her, motioning to the left. “Femmes first,” he said playfully. Something she hadn’t realized the mech was capable of until now.

“Age before beauty.” She quipped back, quoting a famous poet. It was a habit from working in the archives, a word game they used to play among themselves to keep the long shifts more enjoyable. Her face flushed slightly and she glanced up at the mech, worried she’d caused offense.

Megatron barked a laugh and flashed her a truly wicked smile. “Experience before youth.” He replied, chuckling as he quoted back the same poet.

Her spark pulsed in her chest and she froze momentarily. Oh. That smile had no right to be so endearing.

She may have a problem.

Chapter End Notes

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Frequency- Blaster
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire

Hornet- Bumblebee
Figment- Mirage
Steadfast- Hound
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot

Chapter 10: A Warning

I would like the comments about updates to stop, thanks.

Gonna be honest, it's kinda rude guys. I lost a family member, had my mom go through heart surgery, had My wedding and then had my Sister's wedding.

You have to remember that I'm Human too, and I have a life. Sometimes that life gets in the way.

From now on any comments even mentioning Updates will be deleted out of hand.

If you want to keep up to date about my schedule and get WIPs you can find me here Shelaar.

Chapter 11: Artwork!

Chapter Summary

We got Artwork of the Autobot Sparklings!

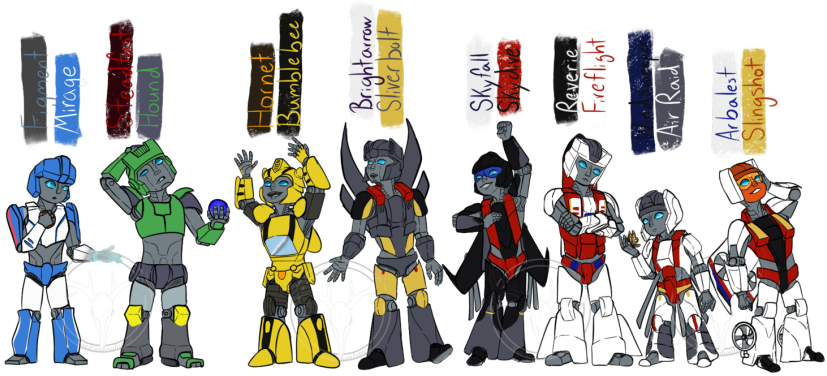
Send all your love to mulitfandomintrest for this amazing contribution~

I put them out of order from **mulitfandomintrest's** original post because I wanted everyone to get the reveal of their new colors last~

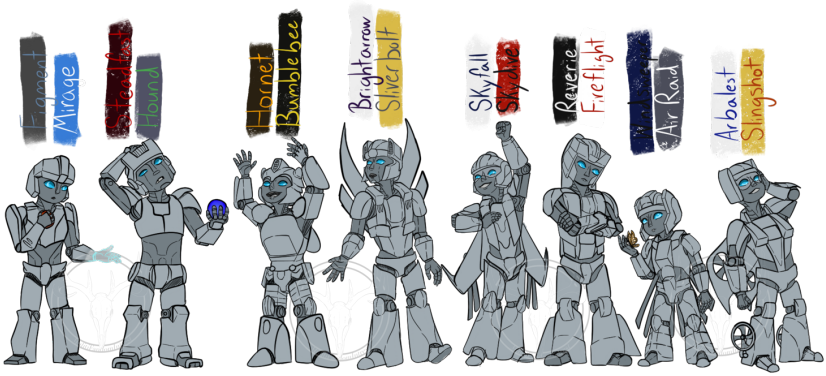
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Original Colors~



Colorless~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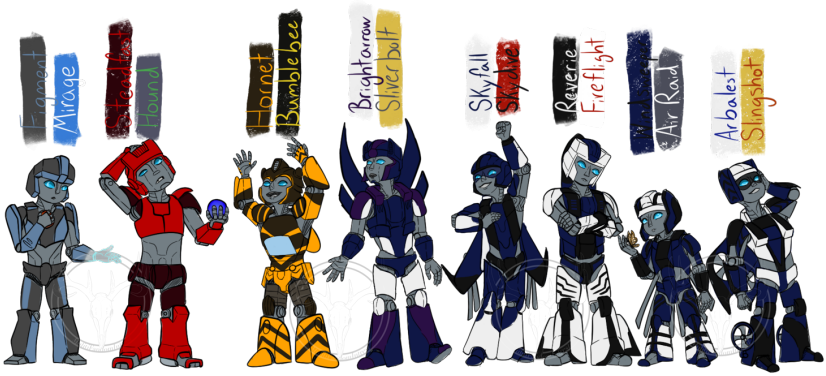
Mirage
Headlines
Hound
Hornet
Bumblebee
Brightarrow
Silverbolt
Skyfall
Skydive
Reverie
Freflight
Air Raid
Arbalest
Slingshot

New Colors~



Chapter End Notes

Just look at Hornet! He wants uppies from Aria!

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> AN: There are two really fun References in here. One to an old game and another to literature/a movie character. Let me know if you guys catch them!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Lectura]

Following the Decepticon Seeker further into the bowels of the Nemesis, the femme crossed her arms beneath her chest in discomfort. From the darkened halls of the ship she could feel optics roaming over her frame, sending a shiver down her spinals struts. While she trusted the Prime implicitly she was beginning to feel like they may have miscalculated. Coming to the Nemesis rather than suggesting they bring the supplies to more neutral ground, like the temple, might have been a mistake. But Aria was as idealistic as Optimus, maybe more, and believes that the Warlord would honor his word.

Something Aria experienced in the bowels of the temple had clearly rattled the femme. Not that Lectura could fault her. Scientifically the process that turned them into femmes and sparklings fascinated her. It shouldn't have been possible! Yet, here she was. But no matter how many scans she'd done on the temple she couldn't find even a hint that there was a basement level, let along that cavern they'd all fallen into.

Whatever was there before it had completely disappeared. Leaving them all forever changed.

"We'll be working out of this lab. I already have everything set up." The Seeker, Thundercracker, stopped and motioned towards their destination. "I'll let you look over the equipment. If we need anything else I can get it set up before we start." He seemed like a very relaxed kind of mech, for all that he was part of Starscream's Trine.

"Sparkling energon doesn't need specialized equipment, just a different amount of additives and diluting. But I'll see whether your initial set-up is sufficient." Passing him she looked into the room and her optic ridge raised slightly in surprise. She'd expected it to be messy, or at least disused, but the entire room was pristine. The room

even had all the proper protections in place in case of a lab accident. She turned to look at him and he smiled at her in a friendly manner.

“Starscream hates when the labs aren’t up to code.” He said with a shrug that shifted his wings.

“Oh. Sometimes I forget, but he actually did go to the Science Academy, didn’t he?” It was… strange to think that the Decepticons had lives before the war, just like the Autobots had. “I imagine he doesn’t get to do much exploration or science as a… leader.”

Thundercracker let out a small sound of agreement as he started re-arranging some of the utensils and containers they’d need while brewing. “He has too much to occupy his time. But maybe…” The mech shrugged without finishing the thought. “How do you want to proceed?”

Lectura looked down at the small vat they currently had to work with. “Let’s work on a case by case basis. The sparklings with flier frames will need more complex hydrocarbons, which should not be mixed with any of the other fuel type. I have notes Rivet wrote up with some specifics for the ratios of additives.” Pulling out a dataslate she set it down on a stand that had helpfully been pulled out and placed on the table.

The mech glanced over and read the first few lines of text before nodding. “It doesn’t seem that difficult. To work?”

“As long as we don’t over-boil it, everything should go smoothly.” She agreed. “Yes, let’s.” They had hungry little ones to feed.

[Frequency]

She’d fragged up. She knew she’d fragged up. But if she acted like she’d fragged up then the Con leading them around was going to notice. Glancing at Aria she wanted to wince. It felt like she’d just let everyone on the team down. If only she hadn’t called Soundwave by that silly nickname she’d made for him! There was no way he hadn’t realized what it meant.

::…you okay?:: Feeling her cassettes’ restlessness she placed her servo against the compartment where they were tucked away, safe.

::I’m fine. Do not deploy unless I give my express permission. This isn’t a joke. We’re in the belly of the beast now.:: She reminded them.

::Yes, Creator.:: She heard the teasing tone and wanted to snort in amusement. Instead she put her hands behind her helm and decided to try and wheedle the screamy one. “So now where are we going?”

Getting a scathing look in return she just smiled. Okay, that had been worth it! At least a little bit. Aria gave her a look that was telling her to behave, but also looked highly amused at her antics. She would have to tell the Prime that she’d made a mistake. But maybe… maybe she could salvage the situation? They basically had no identities that could be proven at the moment. But they weren’t the hardest thing to forge. All you needed was a medic and someone who knew how to file information with false time stamps.

Frequency snorted in amusement. It was a good thing that they had a medic, a psychiatrist, and a former archivist with them! Maybe a little too much of a coincidence. It was almost like it had all been planned.

That thought didn’t leave her feeling very comforted as they continued down the dark halls of the Nemesis. Led by one of their greatest enemies.

[Skydancer]

Watching as the nestlings played on the appropriately sized play set the large femme couldn’t help but to smile. Spending time with them was very calming for her spark. The tumultuous and panicked thoughts she’d had earlier about being reformatted into a femme forgotten, even though it hadn’t happened too long ago. The moment she’d seen the nestlings something deep inside her coding clicked into place. It was the first time Skyfire had felt settled since… well, ever.

She’d always wanted nestlings of her own, had even thought she might have found the right partner… but it never seemed the right time. Too busy with the science academy, the aerospace division, research projects, then… war. A war which tore her away from a mech she had long since lost her spark to, but who had no idea of the depth of her feelings. He’d always been so ambitious and she’d never felt she could match the lifestyle he wanted and deserved.

But now… now here she was, a femme named Skydancer, with nestlings who had already begun the bonding process. Their chirps and warbles had changed from ‘a familiar femme’ to ‘our caretaker.’ It wouldn’t be long until they considered her their creator in truth. It made her spark fill with joy and apprehension in equal measure.

How was she going to take care of five nestlings alone?

A small chirp caught her attention and she smiled down at Skyfall, who had wandered over to the wall she was leaning over. Reaching down she ran her digits over his small helm and over his little cheek. He let out a happy little trill and practically flopped into her servo; seeking attention. With a small chuckle she lifted him into her arms and cuddled him close.

Something warm brushed against her field and she glanced over at the mech who'd come to stand next to her. Skywarp had a wide smile on his face as he watched her and Skyfall. It was a little embarrassing to feel her spark give a little flutter in her chest. She'd feared that Thundercracker and Skywarp would be offended by Knock Out's alterations to her paint. Taking the colors of the Winglord's Trine without permission would have been a grave offense before the war. It was something reserved for the Conjunx of the Winglord or his Trinemates. Someone like her being allowed… it made her flush with embarrassment.

"You're so good with the nestlings!" Skywarp said suddenly, rising up on his pedes to look at Skyfall in her arms.

"Thank you, Skywarp. I certainly try to be." Leaning down so he could see Skyfall better she smiled when the mech bumped his helm very gently against the nestling in a show of affection.

Something brushed against her arm and she looked down to see the mech's digits trace the purple lines on her frame. "You also look really good with our colors." The mech practically purred.

Skydancer's face darkened with a blush and she had to turn away to set Skyfall back down in the playpen. If only to ignore the mech's very pointed gaze. "Th-thank you."

An amused chuckle was all she got in return.

[Aria]

"Halfway through the series they killed off Fortress and revealed it was his bond-mate, Crystalbell, who was the mastermind the entire time. It felt trite at the time, but on further viewing it was glaringly obvious that she'd been in every scene where the Senator had been plotting. The historical reenactments weren't terrible, and they clearly had a talented researcher on their team. But the dialogue…" Megatron let out a small vent of disdain and shook his helm in disgust.

Aria chuckled, not bothering to hide her amusement. The fact that

Megatraon used to watch historical dramas was something of a surprise. The fact that he liked to dissect them for accuracy, however, was not. “Do you remember what Crystalbell said to Fortress when she stabbed him in the back?” Literally, in the case of the show.

“No, but perhaps you could remind me?” The mech asked with a raised optic ridge.

Putting on a higher pitched voice and a noble caste accent Aria quoted; “What is a mech, but a miserable little pile of secrets? Now those secrets will go with you to the Well, and I shall be the one to rule! No one will suspect it was I, Crystalbell, who was the genius behind all of your schemes!” In that scene the femme had dashed her cube of fake energon onto the ground, shattering it over the corpse of her murdered bond-mate.

Megatron groaned, almost sounding like he was in pain, and placed his servo against his face. “Tch, I forgot how over-dramatic the acting and line delivery were.” He sounded annoyed but she could see the small uptick of his scarred lip beneath his servo.

“Oh, it was nearly unbearable.” She agreed, laughing openly. “But I still watched the entire thing. Some of the historical facts and cultural norms of the time were fascinating, and I was able to cross-reference those scenes in the Archives.”

Megatron dropped his servo and stared at her for a moment, quiet and observant. “Which archives were you working in to have that kind of access? I had to use a significant amount of shanix just to afford the upload speed required to access the archives in the next Citystate.”

The very idea made Aria feel indignant on the mech’s behalf. “The fact that you had to pay to access what should have been a free resource is despicable.” She stated firmly. “No bot had to pay an entrance fee to the Iacon Central Archives. The only fee was if the item was lost, broken, or had been held for too long and was causing a significant backlog of bots who wanted access to those files.” It wasn’t quite a lie on her part, although maybe a little bit by omission. Orion Pax had worked in the Iacon Central Archives… as a liaison and a representative for the Hall of Records under his mentor Alpha Trion.

Megatron didn’t seem too surprised by this fact. Just earlier he had reciprocated her respect for his culture by returning the favor. She knew that it had to irk him to emulate the etiquette of the bots he so despised. The fact that he was even trying meant a lot to her.

The elevator pinged and the doors opened, reminding her she was not there to get lost on her own thought processes. Exiting the elevator first at Megatron's prompting she stepped out into a massive cargo bay stacked high with storage cubes. Nearby stood a much older mech with extensive battle scarring on his armor. The mech looked up from his dataslate with crimson optics. From his frame design and decorations she determined he was most probably Kaonian in origin.

The mech strode toward them and stopped a polite distance away. "Lord Megatron." The mech said respectfully, placing one fist against his chest and bowing his helm briefly. Finished greeting his leader he gave her a quick once over, his optics narrowing slightly on her Autobot insignia. "Welcome t'storage depot three. Th'name's Quartermain but ev'rybot calls me Quartermaster. I run th'place. Any stock in'r'out goes through me. If ya see that lil'rat Swindle skiving off, tell'm I'll have his gears for grinders if I catch'm." He said in place of any kind of formal greeting.

Megatron looked mildly amused next to her when she glanced his way, but his optics were also assessing.

"A pleasure to meet you, Quartermain. I hope my lateness didn't inconvenience you in any way. What are my assigned tasks this shift?" She knew from a cultural perspective that the mech had to be someone important. The amount of scarring on his armor suggested a mech well versed in combat and his age suggested experience. Any elder Warframe was highly respected for their ability to survive and live long enough to retire. Or in this case move from active combat to a support role.

The mech gave her a lopsided grin. "Polite lil'thing, aint'cha?" His optics shifted to Megatron's for a moment and there was an almost imperceptible nod between the two Warframes. "Y'll just be checkin stock fer now. Makin' sure th'amount matches th'manifest." He held out the dataslate to her and she took it with her left servo, palm upward. The mech's optic ridges rose in surprise before he gave her a more genuine smile. "I'll be here, n'case ya need somethin."

Smiling she nodded to him politely before turning to Megatron. "I'm sure you have much better things to do than watch over my work hours. Perhaps we can speak more on literature later once I have a break?"

Behind her she could hear Quartermain let out a loud snort but didn't turn around to see what was so funny.

Megatron watched her for a moment, almost like he was searing her image into his memory drive. “I will return to escort you at the appropriate time. Have a pleasant work shift, Aria.” That said he returned to the elevator and crossed his arms over his chest, almost as if he were brooding.

“Have a pleasant orn, Megatron.”

Quartermain let out a small whistle once the doors of the elevator had closed. “Y’got spinal struts’a durabyllium, femme.” Motioning to the stacks of supply cubes he nodded at the dataslate in her servo. “Have at’t. Give a holler if y’need help.”

“Thank you, Quartermain. I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime
Frequency- Blaster
Lectura- Perceptor
Skydancer- Skyfire/Jetfire

Hornet- Bumblebee
Figment- Mirage
Steadfast- Hound
Brightarrow- Silverbolt
Skyfall- Skydive
Reverie- Fireflight
Windsweeper- Air Raid
Arbalest-Slingshot

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Adding a little bit of world-building and some Headcanons of mine.

Chapter Notes

Aria/Aria Prime- Orion Pax/Optimus Prime

Rivet- Ratchet
Rebound- Springer

Current Femmes and their Sparklings;
Aria (Optimus) with Hornet (Bumblebee)
Skydancer (Skyfire) with the Aerialbots
Rivet (Ratchet) with Swiftstrike (Sideswipe) and Sunspot (Sunstreaker)
Rebound (Springer) with Dusty (Sandstorm) and Outburst (Broadside)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[Megatron]

::So, old friend, what are your thoughts?::

There was a faint crackle on the other end. ::Polite, too pretty for Iacon. You didn't coach her, did you?:: Came the curt reply.

He chuckled to himself in the elevator. Trust the old mech to get straight to the crux of the conversation. ::No, Warmaster Quartermain, I did not. Imagine my surprise when, after our negotiations came to a conclusion, the femme herself offered me a proper Kaonite servo-shake. She kept her palms flat on the table the entire time as well.::

It took a moment for him to get a response and he could almost imagine the look of disbelief on the old mech's face. ::Where the pitslag did she learn that from?::

::She was an Archivist in Iacon's Central Archives, apparently Culture was a particular area of interest to study on her orns off.:: Along with History, philosophy, and religion.

::Have you fought her yet?:: There was a cautious yet amused note in the mech's voice now.

Megatron grumbled. ::Not like that, old friend. However…:: He hesitated only a moment before venting. ::When I first arrived on the planet she ambushed me with her cohort. I believed it was my great Enemy and so I swung too high, expecting a mech of a familiar size. She ducked beneath my arm and came up from under my guard. You should have seen it, Quartermain. A picture perfect shield blow to my chin and a following leg sweep that brought me to the ground.:: Just remembering it now made him twitch, his digits curling against his arm. If that was Aria during an ambush he could only imagine what she would look like in a full combat encounter. Remembering the determined look in her optics and the protective stance in the hall…

::She has a shield? A proper shield?:: Was the first question that came over the comm at his confession. A moment later he heard the low grumble of anger. ::You let some Autobot take you to the ground!? I ought to haul you to the training room and remind you why you should never lower your guard!::

Megatron laughed. ::A proper shield, with a power source. I haven't seen her bring out any of its offensive capabilities yet. And I had the upper servo in the end, old friend. It was I who released her.:: He hadn't been quite sure why at first, but something deep in his coding had stilled his servo. He wasn't even certain he'd registered the sparkling before or after he decided he would let her live.

::Why? You're taking risks, Megatronus, that isn't like you.:: And there came the concern, veiled as criticism. The same way the mech had spoken to him back in the pits of Kaon's arenas.

::You've heard about the sparklings, yes?::

::I did, wasn't sure how true the rumors were though.::

::Aria has a sparkling of her own. He'd escaped his caretaker and appeared at the end of the hall where the skirmish was taking place. You know it is never my intention to hurt the innocent.:: No, it wasn't his intention, but he had certainly hurt many innocents during this war. Unlike what the Autobots believed he did understand the weight of his actions and the sparks he had snuffed out for the sake of the greater good. ::She was desperate to protect him… so I let her go and ordered a cease on all hostile actions.::

The older warframe let out a low growl, the equivalent of a sigh in

any other mech. ::Just be sure to keep on guard, mechling, I'm not going to be able to drag your heavy aft out of the flames for much longer.::

Megatron chuckled. ::I seem to remember pulling yours out of more fires than I can count, old friend.:: He sobered. Being reminded that his old friend was having spark issues was not how he wanted the conversation to end. ::Quartermain. They have a proper medic on their team. A femme named Rivet who knows her way around a warframe. Once she's been thoroughly vetted by Soundwave she may be able to… do something.:: He didn't want to say 'help' or 'aid,' that would only put the old mech's hackles up.

Just as he expected he heard a scoff from the other side of the comm. ::You're as likely to get me under an Autobot's blade as you are to reformat me into a Seeker. I am content, Megatronus, so long as you live to see our Cause through.::

Letting out a heavy exvent he grit his dentae. ::I'll return when Aria's shift is over. I don't want her wandering and I don't trust any but myself or my most trusted confidants to escort her.::

There was a long beat of silence. ::What are you planning? Why help these Autobots? The sparklings, I understand, but the Autobots?::

A smirk crossed his face as the elevator finally came to a stop. ::I plan to put an end to the Autobots, by having them join us.:: With Aria at his side he would have everything he needed to end the war. An equal partner who knew the Autobots inside and out. Intelligent, beautiful, elegant, dangerous. All he had to do was bring her to his side and convince her that they were the future.

::You're going to try and Claim her?:: The old mech's voice didn't sound too surprised. ::Is that why you brought her to me, mechling, for an Elder's approval?:: It was the first step in the courting process. Introduce a potential mate to a trusted elder.

::I brought her to a mech I would call 'father' for approval, if I'd ever had such a thing.:: He paused, frowning. ::You are also my oldest and most trusted friend. I would like to know what you think of my plan overall. Know that Starscream has already latched onto the Autobot Shuttle femme and her five sparklings. His Trine seems inclined to agree with him.::

There was a cackle of laughter over the line. ::That flighty little son-of-a-scraplet? Didn't think he had it in him.:: There was a long pause

before the mech let out another growl. ::For what it's worth, son, you have my approval. For now. I'll keep an eye on your Autobot and judge her worth for myself. Don't be surprised if I throw some obstacles in the way.::

Megatron smirked. ::I was hoping you'd say that. I have a meeting, we will have to speak more later.::

::Keep your guard up, Megatronus. Until later.::

[Rivet]

Sitting with the other femmes and the remaining sparklings the medic grumbled to herself. Nearby Sideswipe and Sunstreaker, now called Swiftstrike and Sunspot, were playing with a game that Mistveil and Jive had cobbled together. It was astounding how difficult some of the little sparks could be. Yet somehow the two little devious mechlings seemed to have attached themselves to her. Their little clicks and happy beeps made it hard for her to stay angry with them for long and they must have realized it.

Now that the two of them were occupied she could go about doctoring the medical files that had been requested by the Nemesis. Something that she was certain they didn't need but had been servo-waved away as being 'important.' In the interest of co-operation Aria had agreed, but only with the most relevant details and the rest redacted. They both agreed to send the files of the sparklings first, just in case something were to happen to the remaining Autobots who could fight and advocate for themselves. Making up an excuse about stasis sickness and data corruption making them lose access to the original files she opened new documents and began to fill out the details for each spark in her care.

Designation; Hornet
Creation date; Unknown
Creation location; Unknown
Creator; N/A
Polity; Iacon
Age; 2 Kilocycles
Frametype; Civilian
Alt mode; N/A
Registered Creator/Caretaker;

Here Rivet paused. Although it hadn't been stated directly she knew that Creation Bonds could be established after a sparkling lost their

original creators. She had seen the way Optimus and Bumblebee acted towards one another, the familial bond they wanted to share but denied themselves. The bond that was already so strong between Aria and Hornet that no one could deny he was her creation in spark. But this also posed another problem. Normally in these types of files there would be a link to a second file for the creators of the sparkling in question. Since she hadn't finished Aria's she couldn't link her file. Even then, Rivet wasn't sure if she should make a false file for Aria or not.

Regardless of the Matrix going dormant they had been able to establish that it still existed within her new frame. She was still a Prime. Giving false information, or even redacting that information, could end in a disaster if it was ever found out. Shuttering her optics she took a deep vent of air before slowly exventing. It was a problem they had no solution for at the moment. She would have to consult Aria about it later and make the decision then. For now she would add Aria as Hornet's creator without the link. The medics on the Nemesis would just have to deal with it.

Turning back to her task she was startled when an emergency signal blared through her helm. It was on both the medical frequency and the command frequency. Aria had ordered those heading to the Nemesis to narrow their comms frequencies to just the Temple, in case the Ark tried to contact them. But that left Pacer, Jive, and herself as the only bots able to be contacted.

Checking over the priority alert she realized it was for video. Pulling up her dataslate she saved her progress and unencrypted the code in the message. The moment it connected she was met with an odd sight.

On her feed was a strong looking femme. She was clearly a warframe, around middle age, and stood military straight. "You're not Prime. Identify yourself!" She snapped, sounding like every NCO Rivet had ever had in the past.

"Well, my former designation is Chief Medical Officer Ratchet, but thanks to extenuating circumstances I've chosen to go by Rivet. And who might you be?" There was something familiar about the femme but she couldn't put her digits on it… not without a paint scheme to match her with.

"Ratchet? Well, that's a new look. Hmph. This is Sergeant Kup of the Wreckers, currently working aboard the Ark. Where's Prime?"

Rivet pulled the dataslate away from her face for a moment, trying to comprehend what she'd just learned. Dear Primus below! "Right back at you!' She blurted, pulling the dataslate closer. "I guess I don't need to ask about what happened, I think I can guess." Feeling something climbing on her leg she glanced down at Swiftstrike. The mechling chirped at her, giving her a triumphant grin.

"If your guess is 'at least thirty percent of the crew turned into little sprockets and ten percent of the remaining was reformatted into femmes'- then you'd be correct." The femme said as she crossed her arms over her chest.

"…that wasn't the ratio down here. But we were the epicenter of whatever transpired. Fra-," she looked down at Swiftstrike and bit her glosssa to not cuss in front of him. "Ahem, we have a two to one split, sparklings and femmes. Aria- Optimus Prime isn't here right now. She's… on the Nemesis."

The femme in the video stiffened and grit her dentae. Rivet made a note that the cy-gar Kup needed to function without medical issues was gone. "If you're going to stage a rescue wait until we get back." The military femme said gravely.

"We're not, it was Aria's decision to go to the-" wait. "What do you mean, get back?"

Kup clicked her glossa and shook her helm. "After that gold light swept through the ship we all woke up on the Ark. We're in the next system over, with no record of how we got here. Now, about Prime, what do you mean it was her decision? What the pitslag happened down there?"

Rivet let out a stress filled sigh. "The Decepticons. They showed up a short time after we woke up. Megatron was leading them. I wasn't there for the ambush, but apparently the slagma- ahem, the warlord called a ceasefire. Aria said it was after he saw one of the sparklings, although none of us know why."

Kup snorted. "Warframes," she said with a serious expression, "are sparked with strong Guardian coding. Finding a group of femmes defending their sparklings would have tipped the scales from 'Battle' to 'Protection' protocols. If you woke without paint like we all did, they wouldn't have been able to identify you as enemies."

A shiver ran down Rivet's spinal struts. "Protection… protocols…" The words of that voice echoed through her processor. It couldn't be that

simple, could it? “What else can you tell me about these protocols, Kup?”

“Sergeant!?” Looking over her shoulder at the femme standing a couple feet away Rivet noted the two sparklings clinging to her arms. It was Broadside and Sandstorm, now called Outburst and Dusty. The two mechlings were practically welded to their former superior.

“Who’s this now?” Kup stared at the former mech for a moment before her optics widened. “Springer, lad? Well, not a lad now I suppose.” There was a moment of awkward silence before the military femme let out a heavy vent. “Glad to see you’re all in one piece. Any trouble with the Cons?”

Rebound shifted on her pedes, a nervous action. “No trouble, Sir, uh, Ma’am. The Ambush didn’t go on long enough to take any of them out, then Megatron was calling a ceasefire and Prime called us back. Things have been a little strange since then.”

Snorting in amusement Rivet shook her helm. “Aria negotiated a proper ceasefire with the Cons. In exchange for paint and sparkling grade energon we’re working maintenance and labor shifts on the Nemesis. I haven’t been able to catch anything sinister within the agreement, but it’s just a matter of time before something goes wrong.”

Kup tilted her helm and let out a grunt of acknowledgment. Then her optics narrowed in thought. “Did Prime and Megatron do battle during the ambush?”

Rebound chuckled. “They sure did. The Prime has a shield now, instead of her old axe. I caught sight of them while I was facing off with the Constructicons. She took him down and had her blaster to his helm. That was as much as I saw before I had to focus on my own battle.”

“Hrmph, I may have to send you some intel on warframes. As civilians you wouldn’t know the old customs and what pitfalls to look out for.” Looking at the sparklings climbing Rebound’s frame she snorted. "I see you already have a couple of the little sprockets well in hand. About time you made me a grandcreator."

Rebound spluttered, optics opened to their widest setting. “Wh-what!?”

Kup smiled warmly and Rivet almost wondered if she should hand the

dataslate over to the other femme and walk away for a moment. This seemed like it might become personal very quickly. “I’m too damned old and damaged to be fancy-footing around like some weak-tanked noble. You’ve been like a creation to me from the beginning. I’d call you my sparkling, if you’ll let me.”

Rebound exvented hard and stumbled a little, reaching out to catch herself on something. Rivet grabbed her wrist and set the other femme’s servo on her shoulder, letting the Wrecker lean against her frame. “Steady, Rebound.” All four sparklings were chirping now in concern.

The femme took a couple of deep vents, running her servos over the sparklings to calm them down. For all her hesitation to even interact with them at first Rivet noted that Rebound had adapted very quickly to the role of caretaker.

“Kup, I- I accept. You’ve been more of a creator to me than my actual creators. I- you- you’re already family to me.”

The old warframe smiled. “Rivet, can you file the formal datawork?”

She huffed. “Yeah, yeah. I can file the dam- the datawork… congratulations, both of you.”

As Rebound introduced Kup to Outburst and Dusty, Rivet couldn’t help but to wonder if this was just the beginning. Of what, she wasn’t sure. But it felt significant in a way she couldn’t explain. Like something deep in her old spark was slowly unraveling, leaving her feeling more hopeful than she’d felt in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

AN: Yes, I do know about Terminus. But he wasn’t a Father to Megatron, he was a Mentor. While they are both important figures to Megatron, Quartermain is the one who is “still alive” that Megatron can look up to. This AU isn’t the most accurate to any particular Canon, although it draws heavily from multiple sources.

AN2: I would just like everyone to know that Time Travel is and has always been Canon to Transformers lore. It’s not something I pulled out of thin air. Chrono is part Time Machine. Hopefully that explains a couple things.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

A fun little intermediate chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Hornet] (Bumblebee)

Climbing the steps of the playset the little mechling grabbed the bars and pulled himself up the rest of the way. His doorwings twitched in excitement as he kicked his legs out in front of him and wriggled into place. Placing his servos behind him he scooched forward a couple feet until he felt gravity starting to pull at his legs. With one more push he tipped forward and let out a happy chirp. Throwing his servos in the air he shrieked on his way down the slide, loving the way the air rushed past his frame. Stopping at the bottom he stood up and let out another series of clicks and chirps. “Again!”

Running back to the stairs he pouted when he saw Brightarrow in his way. He chirped angrily, telling the larger sparkling to move. But the older mechling just glanced at him before turning back around and going up each step slowly. Far too slowly.

Hornet let out another loud chirp and crossed his arms over his chest, doorwings hanging down in frustration. Turning around he went to look for his creator but froze when he realized he couldn’t see her. “Creator?” He let out a loud beep, a sound that was meant to alert his creator that he was looking for her. But when she didn’t appear his alarm grew.

“Creator!?” He let out a much louder beep as he ran over to the wall that kept him from leaving. He was too short to see over the top of it and his creator was nowhere to be seen.

A large white servo came down and lifted him up over the wall. For a moment he relaxed, expecting to see his creator finally. But it wasn’t. It was a big mech he didn’t know.

“Hello little spark. Why are you in distress?” The mech talked funny but he wasn’t giving off any bad feelings. His field was quiet and calm.

It was too bad that Hornet didn't want to feel quiet or calm! Not when his creator was missing! He let out a shrill chirp and a series of angry beeps, trying to climb out of the mech's servos.

"Oh dear, I think you'll have to let me take him." A familiar voice said close by. It was the big Big femme with the huge wings! He liked her! He was gently handed over to the Big femme and chirped in greeting. "Thank you… Reflector, right?"

"That is correct, and you are welcome. I will continue monitoring the other sparklings." The strange mech said calmly before walking away. Not that Hornet cared. All he wanted was his Creator!

"Creator! Where?" He chirped and beeped up at the Big femme.

"Oh sweetspark, Aria isn't here right now. She's working. But once she's done she'll come right back." The Big femme said, rubbing one of her digits over his helm carefully.

"Want Creator!" He demanded, doorwings trembling as fluid began to gather at the edges of his optics.

"Oh no…"

[Siren] (Red Alert)

Everything was loud. That was the first thing he knew from the moment he'd opened his optics. Loud and scary! He'd been on the way to a full meltdown when something bright and gentle had nudged against something inside his chest. Then the warmth was wrapped around his actual chest and he realized it was a bot like him! The slightly larger sparkling gave him a calm smile and snuggled against him. It was like his very presence made all the noise lower in volume.

Clinging to the other sparkling he felt as if he knew them. Somewhere deep in his spark there was a sturdy bond.

"Who?" He chirped quietly. "Why?"

"Forever friend!" The older sparkling chirped at him with a big smile.

He didn't understand at first but he decided to just let the older sparkling do what he wanted. The hug was nice and the less scary noises the better!

Out of caretakers he started to recognize those who were quiet and

those who were loud. The caretaker who moved like she could fly, even without wings, was loud. The caretaker who always seemed to be with her was also loud, which was scary!

The growly caretaker who made sharp noises with her intake was actually pretty quiet! She was worried a lot but she sounded… kind and nice.

Then there was the caretaker who was in charge! She was quiet too, but she was also very sad.

His favourite was the silent caretaker! She wasn't loud at all! All he heard when she was around was a pleasant tone that shifted up and down, like music! It made him feel safe.

After they were taught their designations he learned a little more. Brightflare was the sparkling who was always with him and helped keep the loudness away, his friend that he could feel all the way to his spark. His designation was Siren! And the silent caretaker was Frequency.

But she wasn't there right now. She'd left to go play with the big scary and loud mechs; taking her silence with her.

"Want caretaker!" He chirped, frustrated and forlorn.

Brightflare patted him gently on the helm. "Am here! Go play?" Taking his servo the older sparkling smiled at him, giving off a gentle sound of happiness and concern.

"…yeah. Go play." He agreed. But when the silent caretaker came back he was going to cling to her and not let go!

[Whisper] (Bluestreak)

Sitting next to the femme with door-wings that were like his he quietly watched as she worked on the thingy in her servo. She had a frowny face but she didn't look angry. Scooching closer he tried to see what she was doing but he was too small. He hesitated for a moment, wanting to reach out, but he was afraid. His intake opened to chirp for her attention but… nothing came out. His door-wings fell sadly behind him and he pouted down at his pedes.

A warm servo pressed against his back, careful not to touch the delicate sensors in his door-wings. "I'm sorry little one. I didn't notice that you wanted attention." The femme's voice was smooth and calm,

familiar in a way he couldn't explain. Both her and the other femme with door-wings like his. Somehow he felt like he knew them.

Letting out a quiet chirp he leaned into her servo and smiled up at her.

Picking him up the femme set him on her lap and cuddled him against her chest. He snuggled closer, his optics at half power. Now that he was safe he felt very sleepy.

"I've got you, you're safe." Then she began to hum. The song also felt very familiar, though he didn't know why.

As he was falling into recharge he thought he heard her say something else, but he was too far gone to understand the words.

"I'll always take care of you, little brother."

Chapter End Notes

AN: I forgot to mention; Whisper has Selective Mutism. Whenever he's anxious or afraid he cannot speak.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!